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CONTENTS

FULL LENGTH NOVELLA
MAJOR AWARD CONTENDER!

THE MAGIC GOES AWAY

(Page 44)
by LARRY NIVEN

Exciting New Short Stories

BREAKDOWN	14	by William Colbert
LOVE IN THE CITY	16	by Lee Harding
THE GHOSTS OF EARTH	21	by Robert Hoskins
SPACE: THE REAL GOAL FOR MANKIND	28	by Stephen Goldin
LOVE AFFAIR WITH TEN THOUSAND SPRINGS	33	by R.A. Lafferty
A DAISYCHAIN FOR PAV	40	by Kathleen Sky

Plus:

Special Feature FORECASTING THE FUTURE FOR FUN AND PROFIT	26	by Frederik Pohl
--	----	------------------

Regular Columns

FROM YOU TO US	4	by ODYSSEY Readers
SCIENTIFILM REALM	6	by Forrest J. Ackerman
BOOK REVIEW CORNER	10	by Robert Silverberg
FAN SCENE	52	by Charles Brown

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN B. GAUGHAN

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FROM YOU TO US

ODYSSEY's
New Reader
Corner

Two days ago I picked up a copy of *Odyssey*. I was happy to see a new science-fiction magazine on the newsstand; so many of them have been discontinued over the years. Here's wishing you much success.

I would appreciate it if you would send me a brief outline of what you would like to have submitted in the way of short stories and short novels, and the rate per word you pay. I have just recently completed my first science fiction novel, and am now in the process of editing a short science fiction story I wrote some years ago. Other stories are in the works.

Robert L. Makinson
Wooddale, Ill.

For some years now, I've been enjoying your fine anthologies of horror and science fiction stories. Therefore, it was with a great feeling of pleasure that I found the first issue of your *Odyssey Magazine*!

It was the lovely Kelly Freas cover that first attracted my eye. Once I thumbed through the issue, I just had to buy it!

The contents of *Odyssey* fulfilled the expectation of quality I had come to associate with your name. The size of the magazine, the artwork, and the general layout are all attractive. The columns by Sturgeon, Brown, and Silverberg are interesting and the Zenna Henderson interview was well handled.

I enjoyed all the stories in the first issue, particularly Robert Bloch's spoof of science fiction conventions, and Fred Saberhagen's imaginatively thought-out planet depicted in "Beneath the Hills of Azlaroc." In short, I think you have a new magazine which rivals in quality the excellent *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*!

In future issues, I hope to see stories by Ellison, Bloch, and Leiber, as well as some space opera stories in the Burroughs tradition. In your movie column, I hope you will cover the making of the fantasy, *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger*.

Well, good luck on a fine new magazine!

Carmen Minchella
East Detroit, Mich.

I have just finished reading the premiere issue of your new magazine *Odyssey* and I must admit I am very impressed. As far as I know, it has been some time since a science-fiction magazine of this size, excluding comic types and fanzines, has come out. Most other publications are digest size and have been around for many years, so yours is a welcome change. The talent which appeared in that first issue also impressed me. Rarely do you find the work of such greats as Robert Bloch, Frederik Pohl, et al in a magazine until it has established itself, let alone in its first issue. All of the articles and stories gave me a good deal of enjoyment, especially the article on fanzines by Charles N. Brown. I hope this column in particular continues and perhaps expands in future issues. I will now sit back in expectation of your next issue. Hopefully, it will be as good or even better than the first one.

Raymond W. Costigan
Pawtucket, R.I.

I enjoyed Theodore Sturgeon's article in the Spring 1976 issue of *Odyssey*, although I seem to remember reading of the subject before, in another article by him and in another science fiction magazine about two or

three years ago. What a pity we couldn't have listened to him then, making his latest article needless.

You put together a fine first issue. The only thing I would quibble about is that the words Science Fiction seem conspicuously absent from the cover. And tell Robert Bloch next time you see him that his ETFF was extremely funny, and to me the ultimate praise, entertaining. Some parts were so good I literally had to put the magazine down and stop reading to catch my breath.

Jerry Young
Columbus, Ohio

Congratulations on your new science fiction magazine *Odyssey*.

I really enjoyed the first issue. It contained some great stories. I really loved Jerry Pournelle's "Bind Your Sons To Exile," Frederik Pohl's "The Prisoner of New York Island," and Joseph Green's "Jeremiah, Born Dying." I also liked Robert Bloch's "E.T.F.F." Thomas Scott's "Some-day I'll Find You," was truly haunting. "Captain Clark of the Space Patrol" was quite amusing. Well, so much for the stories I liked. Barry Malzberg's "Impasse" was a good story, but I didn't like it too well. I didn't like Fred Saberhagen's story at all, but who am I to judge? I appreciated "Silverbob's Book Review Corner." I enjoyed "Charlie Brown's Fan Scene," "Out of My Head" by Ted Sturgeon, Paul Walker's interview and "The Editor's Corner." Congratulations to Kelly Freas's fantastic cover. Overall, *Odyssey* is a super science fiction magazine!

Thank you, Mr. Elwood, for letting me express my opinions.

John M. Isabell
Union City, Ohio

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SCIENTIFILM REALM

by Forrest J. Ackerman



The last thing you'll ever see—the flash of his gun—if you flee Logan the 23rd Century policeman.

Forrest J. Ackerman, who this year celebrates his 50th year in the science fiction field, saw his first fantasy film in 1922 when he was probably 5 years old (unless it opened after November 24, in which case he was 6). On the first page of the first fanzine (*The Time Traveller*) in January 1932, he created the first known list of "scienfilms". In 1953, from the hands of Isaac Asimov, he received the world's first Hugo. (He has since been honored with a Japanese and a German Hugo.) He has been Technical Advisor on, agent of and actor in science fiction films; editor of *Spacemen*, the legendary (and only) magazine in the world ever devoted exclusively to sf motion pictures; and for years, in the past, has authored such features for fanzines &azines alike as *Scientifilm World*, *Scientifilm Parade*, *Scientificumatorially Speaking*, *Fantasy Film Flashes*, *Scientifilm Review*, *Scientifilm Spotlight*, etc. ODYSSEY is pleased to present Mr. Science Fiction, who has been at the forefront of science fiction films for nearly half a century, as its regular feature writer on the world of sci-fi motion pictures.

LOGAN'S RUN. A Saul David (he of *FANTASTIC VOYAGE* fame) Production for MGM starring Michael York with Special Guest Appearance by Peter Ustinov.

"The picture that puts the 23d Century in the palm of your hand." (After the Bomb, the atom palm.)

Beyond WESTWORLD . . . the Zest World of Century 23.

Filmed on Locanon: in the 23d Century. (The first film in TempoVision.)

In mid-68 I reviewed the book by William F. Nolan & George Clayton Johnson from which the film has been adapted by David Zelag Goodman and I said in part:

"Outbidding 11 other studios, directors, producers & overseas interests, George (the man with *THE POWER*) Pal has hooked his producer's mitts onto Hollywood's hottest new sf property.

"If the bucks-office receipts of 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY justify it, LOGAN'S RUN as well will be spectacularized in Cinema!"

Well, the work passed out of Pal's control into, temporarily, the hands of another would-be producer, Nolan &

Johnson—as Matheson before them with his own unproduced adaptation of the twice-filmed versions of his "I Am Legend"—did their own screenplay . . . and a remarkably fine one, I am told. Later, the scripter responsible for the best of the JAMES BOND films turned in his version. Still not acceptable to the Powers That Be. A commonplace in Hollywood: like such disparate personalities as Harlan Ellison and A.E. van Vogt working on an adaptation of *Id Meichior*'s "The Racer" (which reached the screen as *DEATH RACE 2000*) after a couple other writers and then Robert (WILD IN THE STREETS) Thom & Charles Griffith finishing up, with an uncredited assist from director Paul Bartel. (Why not Melchior himself?) Like Ray Bradbury spending half a year at MGM, another session at Universal Studios, being paid small fortunes to turn his own *Martian Chronicles* into a shooting scenario . . . and we're still waiting. Like American-International having paid for 13 scripts on HG Wells' *When the Sleeper Wakes* . . . and still not having got one satisfactory to the front office.

"What makes Logan run?" I continued in my book review.

"Ideas. Inventions. Actions. Reactions. Innovations. Extrapolations worthy of Frederik the Great and his late collaborator Kornbluth when creating their groovy Gravy Planet. Novacious yet comprehensible happenings. No New Wave novel, this; no psychedelical Kaleidoscopic Conglomeration of eledissectian yak-yak, no. Nice clean non-hurd-word writing that rates a New Wave. The book might aptly be subtitled *Homer's Odyssey: 21st Century*."

I am fortunate, in my opening quarterly column for ODYSSEY, to have an on-the-spot report of progress on the picture by the co-author William F. Nolan himself. Nolan writes:

Dallas, Texas—A future city is dying: Smoke rolls in let grey clouds, neonated walls spark and shatter, massive blocks of broken concrete rein down, as the panic-driven citizens surge for the exits in a mindless attempt to reach safety.

Which is when Michael Anderson yells "Cut!" He nods in satisfaction. "That's a print."

Anderson is directing MGM's super-

(Continued on page 8)



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(Continued from page 6)

spectacular **LOGAN'S RUN** on location in the sprawling, ultra-modern Dallas Market Center. The Texas city was chosen for its futuristic elements: the mirror-gold Zale Building, the Hall of Nations, Ft. Worth Water Gardens and the Dallas Apparel Mart's eye-popping Great Hall.

"Shooting up here, in these buildings, saves us three million on budget," Anderson tells me. He walks over to one of the big concrete blocks, hefts it lightly in one hand. "Bloody thing bounced," he says to one of the special effects men, Tom Fisher. "They're not supposed to bounce."

Fisher examines the porous styrofoam block, shrugs. "Defective," he says, and carries it away.

"Had some quite nice panic in that last shot," declares Anderson. "These kids are really into it."

"How many extras from the Dallas area are being hired for the film?"

"We'll be using 800 in the Great Hall," he tells me. "All young, beautiful people, since we want to maintain the look of a young, beautiful world. The horror is all under the surface, created by the knowledge that, at 30, in the prime of their lives, they must submit to death."

"When is Logan going to run?" I ask. "Next shot," says Anderson. "They're getting him dirty."

I walk over to Michael York, starring in the film's title role. York is wearing a skintight black "Sandman's" uniform (the garb of tomorrow's special police) in keeping with his portrayal of a manhunter-turned-rebel who runs from his fellow-Sandmen in his bid to live beyond 30. A make-up girl is spraying "grime" on the right side of his face. He grins at me. "Dirt from the outside world," he says. "No dirt here in the inside world!"

He is referring to the fact that most of **LOGAN'S RUN** takes place within a gigantic multi-level city, hermetically sealed from the outside elements by a huge dome. In the screenplay Logan finds his way out of the city into ravaged, abandoned Washington, D.C. fallen into total ruin by the 23rd century. Returning to the city, pursued by other Sandmen, he sets off a chain-reaction which cracks the dome, creating mass destruction.

In the novel I'd written with George Clayton Johnson the city has no dome over it, nor does Logan return to destroy it. But I wasn't complaining. I'd waited 18 long years for the novel to reach production and, right now, I was flatly delighted with the fact that the studio had chosen **LOGAN'S RUN** for their all-out shot at regaining what they termed "the glory of our past."

Now the make-up girl transfers her attention to co-star Jenny Agutter, who

must also look properly begrimed. As Jessica, another rebel who runs from death, she shares Logan's flight to and from the outside world. The delicately-featured, London-born actress resembles a futuristic Peter Pan in her tattered green costume.

Some of the changes in the film were no surprise to me; in June of 1972, in an effort to get Logan running, I had proposed an age shift to Saul David (then story editor at MGM): "Move the population-control death age up from 21 in the book to 30 in the film." I'd been reacting to the phrase "don't trust anyone over 30" and felt that the studio would have a much easier casting situation if all the actors didn't have to look under 21. My suggestion had been incorporated into the screenplay.

Saul David, before he became a producer, had been a book editor, and before becoming a book editor he'd been a portrait artist and muralist. Now, sitting alone in one corner of the set, he was exploiting this latter talent, sketching body-paint designs on a series of inked figures.

"For our psychedelic Love Shop sequence," he says, smiling faintly. "We're using phosphorescent body paint on the nude lovers. They'll glow like neon tattoos under special black lights. We're shooting it in a private club, renting the place for three days."

At a cost of thirty thousand, I'd been told. I was frankly curious about Logan's budget, since the film had been announced at three million and was now being talked at seven.

"It's seven plus," Saul admits. "May go to seven-fifty by the time we wrap up shooting at the end of September. We've got eight hundred thousand into costumes here in Dallas alone and we're putting almost two million into our special sets at the studio in Culver City."

"I hear you're actually building the Lincoln Memorial to scale," I say.

"Right," Saul nods. "There will be old Abe, sitting in his marble chair, all covered with vines, with chipped ears and missing fingers, gazing down at Logan and Jessica."

"Ought to have the same visual impact as encountering the Statue of Liberty half-buried in sand on the beach in **PLANET OF THE APES**."

"We've also constructed an 80-foot working miniature of our domed city," Saul continues, "plus the full interior of Sandman Headquarters with the giant Lifelocks used to keep track of everyone's exact age. And one of the main shock sequences will involve 'Carrousel'—the huge revolving drum that spins the 30-year-olds to their death by fire."

This is a pictorial improvement over the less-visually-dramatic "Sleep Shops" in the novel (used to put citi-

zens to sleep forever).

At this point the amplified voice of Assistant Director David Silver cracks out over the mike: "Places everybody... places."

The young men and women of Dallas quickly arrange themselves in attitudes of alarm and fear. Their city is dying around them, destroyed by a rebel who refused to obey the system.

I have been to the 23rd Century and I am impressed. I have seen the ice caves & the ice sculptures, the futuristic guns, the acrobatic artists rehearsing their climb-for-life in the Carrousel, the Metropolis of Century 23. That is to say, I have toured the sets, seen the Interrogation Room where the much-publicized holographic sequence takes place, visited the New You salon, spoken with the star, the director, the producer.

The producer is very high on his picture. "It's unique," he enthused to me. He believes in **LOGAN'S RUN** he has the greatest science fiction film ever made.

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Arrogance, ignorance or—confidence? I was so impressed with Saul David's **FANTASTIC VOYAGE** that I bought a block of 55 first-run seats as treats for a number of my local sci-fi friends after I'd seen it during opening week. Saul, you've got me scared! At \$3.50 a seat, supposing **LOGAN'S RUN** turns out to be so great that I want to treat 100 friends?

Well, the verdict should be in about mid-76. There's a possibility of the picture being premiered either in L.A. at this year's Science Fiction Filmcon or in New York at the first Science Fiction Exposition. I plan to be at both.

SCIENTIFILM REAM expects to cover in future issues **FUTUREWORLD** (successor to **WESTWORLD**), **THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR**, the remake of **KING KONG**, the new **ISLAND OF LOST SOULS**, **DEMON SEED**, the followup to **DEATH RACE 2000** and—eventually—the property Saul David decides to do after Logan finishes his run! He's seeking another futuristic science fiction story. I've sent him a Care package consisting of *Star*, *The World of Null-A*, *The Weapon Makers*, *Quest for the Future*, *Children of Tomorrow* and . . . **METROPOLIS**. In addition to which, Nolan & Johnson are plotting out a sequel to their original classic: *Logan's World*. The scientific prospects for the future are exciting! ★



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SILVERBOB'S BOOK REVIEW CORNER

by Robert Silverberg



ALTERNATE WORLDS: *The Illustrated History of Science Fiction*, by James Gunn. Prentice-Hall, 256 pp., \$29.95.

In the past few years we have had five or six histories of science fiction (by Messrs. Aldiss, Wolfheim, Lundwell, Moskowitz, et al) and a goodly number of picture-books featuring old s-f magazine covers and associated pictorial matter. Now comes a book that provides both the history and the pictures, in one massive volume. It ought to be definitive. Alas, some sabotage on the publisher's part keeps it from pre-empting the field—but it's still an impressive achievement.

Gunn is of course an authoritative voice. He's been one of science fiction's most respected pros for a quarter of a century; he has done his time at conventions and within the cabals of the Science Fiction Writers of America; he knows everyone and has read everything, his academic creden-

tials are in order (Department of English, University of Kansas); he is no new hand at the analysis of the s-f phenomenon, for it was the theme of his master's thesis, circa 1950, chunks of which were actually serialized in one of Bob Lowndes' pulp magazines long ago. His comprehensive survey of s-f is, like Gunn himself, thorough, unflamboyant, perceptive, a bit on the sober side. He makes little attempt to be charming (cf. Aldiss, *The Billion Year Spree*) and there is not much polemic zeal (cf. Wolfheim, *The Universe Makers*.) Occasionally he allows himself a moment of wry wit—one assumes that the "Short History of Western Civilization, Science, Technology, and Science Fiction," on page 243, which opens with the discovery of fire and the invention of the wheel and closes with the publication of *Rendezvous with Rama*, is intended at least in part to be a gag, for example. But generally he is content to tell the familiar story of how science fiction came up the river with Lucian of

Samosata, Kepler, Verne, and Wells, and evolved into the wondrous genre that we know today. He is particularly good on Poe and Wells, on the rise of the pulp magazines, and on the John Campbell era; he is sketchier on more recent developments, but that's forgivable, considering that one can hardly have much historic perspective on current events, and he is at least judicious in his comments on post-1950 trends. There are a few trivial errors, also forgivable in a book so huge, and there is an occasional reliance on secondary sources in places where Gunn's own views might have been more appropriate. On balance, a commendable text.

The color reproductions of old magazine covers are superb, and wisely chosen to show stylistic evolution. (A portfolio of color plates beginning on page 18 reduced me to such spasms of nostalgia that I had to run to the bookshelves to fondle the original magazines for a couple of hours before

(Continued on page 12)

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SILVERBOB'S BOOK REVIEW CORNER

by Robert Silverberg



(Continued from page 10)

I could go on.) But there are black-and-white plates too, and they are the book's great failure. We are offered photographs of everybody—Isaac Asimov in five different styles of sideburns, Harlan Ellison in every fashion from Early Hood to 1985 Baroque, Norman Spinrad topless, J.G. Ballard likewise, Robert Silverberg with short hair and long (a lanky one, because one of the Silverberg photos is captioned with another writer's name), John Campbell, Damon Knight, Philip K. Dick—oh, just about everybody Roger Elwood somehow isn't there, although Robert F. Young, Raymond Banks, Zenna Henderson, and Edgar Pangborn are, and those faces all were new to me. The trouble is that the black-and-whites are reproduced in a muddy, overinked way that would be a disgrace to a high school yearbook and is an outrage in a \$30 coffee-table volume. A marvelous rogues' gallery is thus reduced to a blur. Nor is the book's typography much better—a stodgy typeface, awkward and dull, and an ill-advised stunt of switching to red ink for extended quotations. The dreary appearance of the book does grave injury to Gunn's cogent and encyclopedic text. Encyclopedias don't have to look encyclopedic. This one will be a basic reference volume for a long time to come, but it could have been fun to read, too, and the fault lies not with Gunn but with his publisher.

THE INFINITY BOX, by Kate Wilhelm. Harper & Row, 316 pp., \$8.95.

A plump and pleasing collection of nine longish short stories, not quite science fiction but also not not-science-fiction, cloaked in a flashy metal-foil wrapper. The stories Ms. Wilhelm tells us in her introduction, are "speculative fiction," a category which, she says, "involves the exploration of worlds that probably never will exist, that I don't believe in as real, that I don't expect the reader to accept as real, but that are realistically handled in order to investigate them, because for one reason or another they are the worlds we most dread or yearn for." So be it, Ms. Wilhelm. These certainly are not robot-spaceship-time-machine stories, and a few of them defy any categorization. But I think the title story, which is among other things a fascinating exploration of extrasensory perception, would meet anybody's definition of s-f, as would the extraordinary genetics-based novella, "April Fools' Day Forever," and the elegantly nightmarish "The Funeral," one of the finest stories to emerge from the *Dangerous Visions* series.

What distinguishes these stories is the richness of the human texture—Ms. Wilhelm's characters have professions, relatives, misgivings, hungers, and a lot of other things rarely encountered in the pages of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*—and the intensity of the author's vision. They

are marred to some extent by her habitual willingness to use a dozen words where eight would suffice ("He walked on the beach for half an hour, then went to his library and picked up the volume of Mann that he was reading: *Joseph and His Brothers*"), but this slackness of style, although regrettable, is hardly disastrous. It does create a certain blandness of prose that sets up conflicts between the placid surfaces of the stories and their dark, turbulent events, but perhaps that's the intended effect, for Ms. Wilhelm seems very much a conscious artist, and there are passages where the writing is quite tight indeed. (Especially when she is describing a landscape or a mood, her eye is keen whether it looks within or without.)

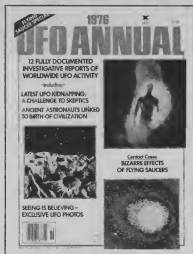
As in any good collection, one story reinforces another: there is a prevailing Wilhelmness about every paragraph that gives the book superb cohesiveness and continuity. It is a joy to spend a few hours in contact with that binding force, that unifying sensibility.

THE INVERTED WORLD, by Christopher Priest. Popular Library, 256 pp., \$1.25.

The first paperback edition of one of 1974's best-loved novels, a Hugo and Nebula Award nominee in its Harper & Row hardcover incarnation. Priest, a young British writer whose work has been growing remarkably in strength from book to book, is now one of the most considerable figures in science fiction, and this flawed but stimulating book deserves attention not only for its intrinsic interest but as an exhibit in the evolution of a major writer.

The flaw, alas, is a fatal one. Having invented a basic situation of almost overwhelming ingenuity—a world of dazzling topological puzzles—Priest is unable to supply an appropriately ingenious explanation for the whole thing, and lets his book crash down into dismal anticlimax. Still, for nine-tenths of the way it's a splendid attempt, told in an elegantly offhand manner that avoids nearly all taint of pulp-magazine cliché. Part Two, Helward Mann's dream-like journey across a bizarrely distorted world, is a masterpiece of eerie logic. A pity that Priest couldn't find a better resolution for his mystery, but, despite the miserable *that's-all?* feeling that the ending engenders, he earns high marks for cleverness along the way. ★

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BREAKDOWN

by William Colbert

Perfection does not exist; to understand that this is truth is the triumph of human intelligence; to expect to possess it is the most dangerous kind of madness.

—Unknown

Man cannot achieve perfection without repentance, followed by salvation through Christ. Perfection, in fact, cannot be had this side of Heaven.

—20th Century Evangelist

We are close. Take a baby, raise it for the first seven years of its life—and you can make it a highly-moral, well-adjusted child who adheres to the accepted standards of society as a whole. Perfection is within our grasp.

—Dr. Warren Miller
Developer of Central

The babies all are wired into Central. Most are only a few days old. The process ideally must begin within minutes after delivery. If a birth occurs too far away from a Central unit, allowances can be made but there is often trouble later. The treatment occasionally doesn't "take" as a result and—

Row after row of them. So tiny. They rest in their metallic carriages, their eyes closed, their heads punctured with the tips of wires feeding in electrical impulses, their—

They are fed intravenously, tubes joining the wires in their flesh, and through microphones implanted in their ears come voices, soothing, kind—

Isn't he cute? Isn't he a darling? Isn't he the most beautiful baby in the world? Isn't he isn't he isn't he

From programmed tapes deep within Central, the words pour forth, messages created by pediatricians after much research and development.

Momma loves you, Momma—

And occasionally the treatment doesn't "take" as a result and—

I dream of him, you know. There are moments when I awaken in wellness, my body shaking with the need of having him but beside me there is no

one. The bed is empty of anyone save me.

And I realize he is dead.

That knowledge hurts. We weren't supposed to be in love. It was wrong, they said. Central condemns it. But we couldn't help ourselves. There was no way that we could have kept ourselves apart.

When he was with me, when I could feel his hands traveling over my body, I saw that the world as Central would have us believe it existed was all wrong. There was beauty. And joy. Such were not weakness. These were strengths, Feelings...

A baby stirred. Its eyes opened, darting from side-to-side. And the hands reached out to—

My dreams are sad because they are always of him. I see him standing by a lake, with pine trees around it. He has just come from the cool waters, and his strong, handsome body glistens under the sun. I run to him, and we embrace, and life is wonderful.

We will do it early. We will control early, almost from the womb itself.

—That's wrong. You can't force-feed anything. Especially morality. You have to persuade. Central can't do it. Legislation won't. Even the religious cults agree that this is so. The change must be voluntary, not—

We're doing it already, my friend. All over the world there are Central units. Wars have been eliminated because Central, in less than a generation, has instilled the concept of war as wrong, evil, senseless. Rape is on the decline. Other crimes are being dealt a death blow. Homosexuality is being wiped out. Pornography no longer is needed. We are being conditioned to think pure thoughts, happy thoughts. It is a good system. It cannot fail. In time we will have another Eden.

—Without God?

Man is his own God. As we progress, as we evolve, we come closer to perfection anyway. Central is helping to speed up the process.

—Something has to go wrong eventually. Something must fail because we, as imperfect creatures, brought Central into being.

You are a cynic.

—No, a realist.
I repeat... a cynic.

We are old before we are born. We have knowledge. We open our eyes with full comprehension. And that is the way we enter the world, given to our parents as "perfect" children. We have a lifetime of learning behind us already, fed into us by Central. A new generation of Albert Schweitzers going about doing good. Eliminating poverty. Wiping away tears. We have no desire to deviate. We are part of a happy, smoothly-running, highly-efficient... compassionate... society.

The baby is too weak. It cannot. Another time. It sinks back, but cannot cry because its mouth is taped shut.

I see him. No, it is an illusion. I know he is dead. He doesn't come to see me anymore. He's either dead or he's found someone else. It has to be one or the other.

But I am still alive and I continue to care.

The parents come. They look at their child, their baby, their automaton. Just as they are. Just as everyone of a certain generation is. War is gone. International morality on the rise. Deviant behavior is being processed into extinction...

John.

I say his name and it still thrills me. I say it softly and I can imagine him near me again. By that lake. Or in my bed. Or—

So easy. Row after row of babies. Wired. Programmed. So easy. And delivered to parents who take him home at the age of seven, who take their little automaton.

It has to come sooner or later! The world was collapsing from its own fifth, wallowing in global decadence. The corruption had to be cleaned up.

—But this way? I still cannot accept the perfection of Central.

Man can do what he says he can.

John?

—Yes, dear.

Hold me.

—Yes, my love.

Why do they say it is wrong? Have

(Continued on page 61)

The Editors Who Brought You UFO Report are proud to announce a new magazine



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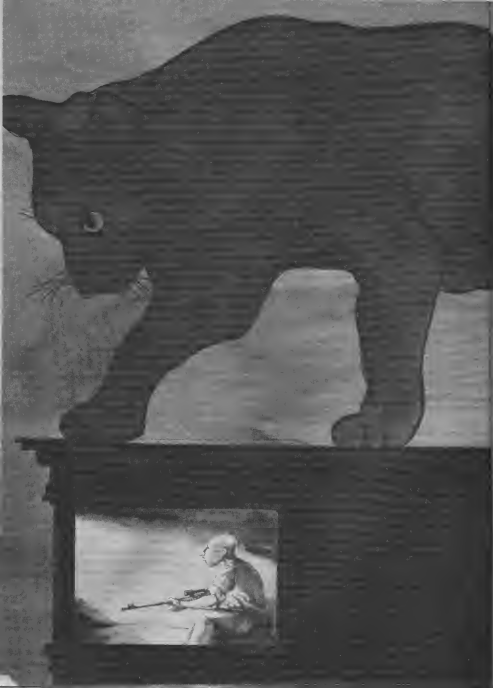
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LOVE IN THE CITY

by Lee Harding

I had been up on the roof for a long time before I thought about Brenda. I was crouched low against a chimney, waiting for the rain to stop and wondering if maybe I should call it a day and go home, when her face came swimming into my thoughts, disturbing them like a feded leaf fallen into a stream. For a while I forgot the ache in my limbs, the drifting rain in my face, and the bitter cold. I tucked the lapels of my coat around my throat and let my mind drift back into the past.

Brenda goes back a long way. We were both born into the heart of a depressed area. In the old days I think they used to be called slums. This was before The Fall, when most of the old houses were still standing and hadn't been torn down to make way for those sprawling, lost-cost housing developments. Now it's all reverted to slums again, and I wonder why they ever bothered.

Brenda was nine years old when she and her family were smeared in a road accident. She was the only thing left alive when everything else had been scraped off the freeway. She was rushed to the hospital—in those days nearly everyone stood a fair chance of getting prompt medical attention in an emergency—and in one way or another the doctors helped her to pull through. But for the rest of her life she remained lame in one leg, and while they did what they could to save her face, the left side was permanently scarred.

By the time she had drifted into her teens Brenda had learned to live with her disfigurement. She must have known that no man would ever covet her, that her crippled leg and her searing ugliness had ensured her lifelong loneliness. Yet there was nothing sad or sentimental about her, and at school she suffered our jibes with a calm indifference I always found unsettling.

Even now, more than half a century later, I feel a deep sense of shame when I recall how cruelly we treated her at times. There's always some poor, unpleasant girl who becomes degraded by adolescent schoolboy fantasies; the tales I listened to were like the stories I also told behind her back, simple-minded gossip about the local tart who would do anything, anything, for a dollar. And with a face like that, why shouldn't she?

Looking back, I doubt if any of those stories were true, but I laughed along with everyone else—at her expense. Brenda bore our lies with surprising patience, as if our malice were of no real importance and our crude attentions, in their way, something of value. Oh, she was a strange one, all right.

As we grew older, our boyish fantasies subtly shifted, and Brenda began to acquire a more mysterious reputation. Now that we no longer needed her to assuage our adolescent sexual fantasies, the emphasis of our imaginations shifted. There were some of us who maintained that Brenda had become a witch, and that she indulged in Dark Practices and made secret pacts with the Devil. You must remember this was in the Old Days, when people could still amuse themselves with those old fairy tales.

I found this new image of Brenda hard to take. But when one of the boys told me he had followed her the previous night, down any number of dark alleyways before his courage gave out and he got spooked, well, I began to wonder. What was she up to? Since we had left school Brenda had led a more secluded life than ever before. We knew she lived with some old aunts of

and went inside. The first I knew: it belonged to some relative of hers. The other two were unfamiliar, and already I felt uneasy because I was moving out of familiar territory. Some of the gangs around this part of the world were really tough, and I had no wish to tangle with them. But Brenda's mysterious behaviour lured me on, and I decided it was about time I made my presence known.

I waited outside while she made her fourth call and accosted her quietly as she came back out. "Hi, Brenda. What yer doin', eh?"

She cringed instinctively. I had forgotten that my back was to the streetlamp some distance away and that my face would be almost in darkness. But she recognized my voice. She peered at me for a moment, then said, "Oh, it's you, Peter. Gave me quite a start. Been followin' me, have you?"

Her question caught me off guard.



hers, but apart from that all we really knew about her were the things we made up in our heads.

I decided to do some investigating of my own. As I recall, it was a bitter cold winter's night when I parked myself in the shadows behind her house. I had a long wait. It must have been about ten o'clock when I saw her creeping out the back gate. She was wearing a tattered grey overcoat over a pair of old jeans, and she carried a large plastic bag in her right hand and her walking stick in her left. She set off down the lane and I followed at a discreet distance.

The houses in our area were all single-fronted. Narrow back lanes connected everybody's backyard with everybody else's. They stank of sour garbage and excrement and all kinds of decaying refuse, but I don't suppose you'd remember that.

I watched her hobbling along ahead of me, the wan light of an ancient corner streetlamp throwing long shadows after her. She stopped at three back gates

Instead of answering I said, "Need any help with that?" The plastic bag she was carrying in her right hand was half-filled with scraps. People ate well in those days, you may recall, and there was usually plenty left over after meals.

She shook her head and hobbled off down the lane. I went after her, not hurrying because I did not want to frighten her again. One always maneuvered to walk on Brenda's right, so that you weren't bothered by her disfigured face and her lame leg didn't get in your way. Only the large plastic bag occasionally bumped against me, carrying its curious cargo.

"What you got in there?" I asked, trying to make conversation.

"Scraps."

"What kinda scraps?"

"Just . . . scraps."

She didn't seem to want me around. She stopped for a moment and looked at me. The glare of the next street lamp cut diagonally across her face and

made her look hideous for a moment. But I was used to that. "You want to come along?" she said.

Her offer caught me unprepared. "Where to?"

She gave a crooked smile. "Wanted to follow me, didn't you? Well, you don't have to skulk along behind me in the shadows to find out where I'm going. You can come, if you like . . ."

Even now, so many dreadful years later when so much has passed away, I can still hear the gentle emphasis she placed upon that word. I like to think that she thought more kindly towards me than the others, because I sometimes took time out to talk to her. Don't ask me what we talked about: that's all gone down the funnel of time, along with everything else I used to remember as being worthwhile. Let's just say that, in the years since we had left school, we had spoken together more often than I had made sport of her



disfigurement, and that in a way we had come to regard ourselves as friends. It was through Brenda that I really got to know women as people, if you understand what I'm getting at.

Anyway, I made myself look bold right then and said, "But where yer goin' then?"

She gave a mischievous grin. It was an expression that could have scared the daylight out of a stranger, and she knew it. She nodded her head for me to follow, and without another word we continued on our way down the gloomy alley.

By now we must have been a good half mile into unfamiliar territory and I was getting more anxious every minute. Not that I was really scared, mind you: I just didn't fancy getting jumped and being outnumbered. Brenda wouldn't be much help if I was . . .

We came to her fifth call. Leaning her plastic bag against the tin fence, she reached through a hole in the gate and opened it from the other side. Then she picked up the bag and squeezed

through.

I went in after her, keeping a little way behind. The backyard was tiny, like all the rest. There was hardly enough room for the solitary fig tree struggling to keep alive. There was an outhouse and right next to it, a shabby wooden lean-to that served as a wash-house and fuel storage. A narrow path ran up the side of the house and connected with the street out front. Over the back door an ancient grapevine struggled to keep feebly alive.

Brenda knocked quietly on the door. A moment later it opened and light spilled out. I was standing unconsciously close to Brenda's left and was unprepared this time; the sight of her scarred face gave me quite a turn.

A man stood on the doorway, peering down at us. The light from behind kept his face in shadow, but he seemed middle-aged. "Evenin', lass," he said. "Come for yer scraps agin?" Brenda nodded, already opening the neck of her plastic bag. "Just a minute, then," the man said. "Be back in a jiff . . ."

I waited patiently with Brenda, wondering what to expect next. The man returned a moment later with a china plate piled high with leftovers. "Not much tonight," he apologized. "Come back at the weekend, should have lots then. Family's comin' over for dinner . . ."

I watched him carefully scrape the odds and ends of food from the plate with a knife, directing them into the open neck of the plastic bag. He spoke kindly to Brenda as he did this, as though they were old friends at this sort of game. Brenda thanked him and closed the bag, holding the neck tight in her right hand.

"Thanks, Mister Nichols," she said, moving off down the path.

The man leaned out of the doorway, peering after us. "Who's that you've got with yer? Never seen 'im before . . ."

"Just a friend," she answered. "Good night, Mister Nichols. Thanks for the scraps . . ."

"Yer welcome, lass. Any time . . ."

I shut the gate behind us. "Now where to?" I asked. It was getting late and we had a long way to go before we got back to our own neighborhood. Maybe the cold would keep most of the gangs inside tonight. Being out so late didn't seem to bother Brenda at all; night seemed to have become her natural medium. She had survived the gangs for a long time and would probably continue to do so. Her kind didn't matter to them . . .

She didn't answer my question, and I didn't press her. From the way the weight of the plastic bag dragged beside her I had a feeling we were about to make our last call. Now I would know

if the wild stories I had heard about her had any foundation.

I recognized the place as soon as she stopped by it. When I was a boy we used to call it the Ghost House. A mysterious fire had gutted it years ago; only the brick walls were still standing and portions of the roof. We were only about half a mile from my own home; Brenda had brought me to this place by a circuitous route, for reasons best known to herself. And now . . .

I said, "Is this it?"

She nodded.

"You sure took us the long way round to get here . . ."

"I just wanted to make sure nobody else was following."

I was about to climb over the rickety tin fence when she grabbed my arm and showed me where some of the corrugated sheeting had nearly come away from the wooden framework. We squeezed through, Brenda still hanging grimly to her plastic bag and hauling it through after her.

We stood in an abandoned backyard that had once been as ill-kept as all the others I could remember, only over the years this one had become a refuse dump for the houses nearby. An enormous mound of refuse decomposed constantly, day in, day out, and in the moonlight my hardened nose wrinkled with disgust. Even my stomach gave a slight turn, but I refused to let it bother me. When our eyes had adjusted to the gloom, we picked our way forward over the rubble.

Brenda led the way into what had once been the kitchen. I stepped cautiously across rotted floorboards and fallen plaster and followed her down the hallway that ran the full length of the gutted house. Individual walls still stood within the skeletal framework, separating the ghosts of one room from another. Overhead a few wan stars peered down through what was left of the roof beams.

Years of wind and rain had scoured the inside of this abandoned dwelling and fed the mould and mildew that thrived on the walls. "What did you want to come here for?" I asked, in a voice that had become a hoarse whisper, filled with nervousness.

Brenda didn't answer. She kept well ahead and moved through into what once had been the large front room of the old house. I stepped through after her, feeling more uneasy every minute. I didn't know what to expect next.

She set down the bag. A moment later there was the scrape of a match and a feeble glow lit up the room. A solitary candle, set high up on an old wooden mantelpiece above a fireplace,

begin to burn brightly.

The floor was in better condition than anywhere else in the gutted house. Lots of old bricks had been jammed into place between the joists and the place was surprisingly clean and well swept. In a corner I saw a stack of battered aluminum plates. While I stood there watching and feeling out of place, Brenda picked them up a few at a time and hobbled into the centre of the room. She set the plates out neatly on the floor and then untied the neck of the plastic bag. She reached inside and began doling out the scraps onto the plates, spreading them evenly. She worked slowly and purposefully, as though performing some private ritual only she understood. Her hands were soon sticky and coated with the leftovers, for in those days there had always been rich brown gravies and sauces, and plenty of mashed vegetables. But this did not seem to bother her. "You can help if you like," she said, matter-of-factly.

I hesitated, then did as I was asked. We knelt on either side of the bag, digging our hands alternatively into the scraps and depositing small handfuls on the battered plates spread around us. At first I found this distasteful; the mess inside the bag was very soggy indeed, but as we got on with our task I began to experience an uncommon pleasure, as though we were sharing a bizarre sort of communion. This thought instilled in me a measure of awe . . . and silence.

Eventually the bag was emptied. Brenda thoughtfully transferred small quantities of the scraps from some of the plates until each carried roughly the same amount. Then she stood up, wiping her hands on her old jeans.

I was gripped by an uneasy silence. Somehow I had been unwittingly drawn into a mysterious ritual Brenda had devised, and I wasn't at all sure I was going to like what was about to happen. My legs had gone to water and I couldn't move.

She straightened her crooked body as best she could; then she went over to the mantelpiece where the candle fluttered in the draught. She took down a large aluminum plate which had been hanging from the wall, and a long wooden spoon next to it. She turned slowly around, her eyes fixed on a point beyond and above me, as though transfixed by some inner vision. She lifted her head and looked up and out through the ruined ceiling where the stars watched, and I could see their faint light etching a crooked smile upon her face.

Without warning she began beating the aluminum plate with the wooden spoon. Gently at first, but with increas-

ing vigour until the din was deafening.

I jumped to my feet. "For God's sake Brenda—stop that noise! Do you want to attract every gang in the neighborhood?"

But she didn't seem to hear me, or, if she did, then she chose not to answer. Her heavy pounding set my teeth on edge but she kept beating away at her battered plate as if nothing else mattered. Slowly I recognized a noise I had often heard in the early hours of the morning, when I tossed and turned and tried to get to sleep. I had wondered about it many times, but on those occasions it had come to me from a distance and muffled by many empty houses.

I watched her crooked chest rising and falling from her exertions, the fierce light in her eyes and the flush spreading across her hideous face. And my flesh began to crawl. I wondered whatever had possessed me to follow her to this ridiculous place, and more to the point, who or what was she waiting for? I began to edge towards the door, not wanting to startle her. I had decided it was time to be off. In the morning I would think up some wild tale that would satisfy the gang's curiosity, but for the moment . . .

Just then I heard the strangest sound I have ever heard, and will never hear in just that way again. It began as a distant rustling on the rooftops, like the passage of dry leaves across the slate tiles. My heart began to race, for in those days none of us had completely shaken off our ancient fear of the supernatural. For a wild moment I wondered if Brenda really was a witch, and if she had lured me along to witness some diabolical confrontation with her familiar. But as it turned out I was mistaken on that point—she had summoned not one, but many.

The rustling on the rooftops became an urgent pattering, like a sudden downpour of rain. Then the pattering grew into a fearful drumming, as if the roofs for miles around were thrumming to the tread of a ghostly army on the march, high above the sleeping city. The drumming grew into a roar directly overhead, almost drowning the noise of Brenda's passionate plate thumping. The roar became a thunder and I could feel the night distended with an enormous presence.

My nerves were almost at breaking point, but I was much too frightened to move with that drumming all around me. I wanted to go across to Brenda and explain how I understood why she should choose to indulge herself in some arcane pact with the Devil—but before I could even form my shivering

words the deafening noise overhead metamorphosed into a tide of darkness surging into the room. It swept down the dank walls and poured in through the open doorway and flooded the room.

I cried out and fell back, feeling the darkness blur and boil around me and for a dreadful moment I thought it would engulf me. But my scream died in my throat when I realized what had happened. Dazed and feeling a little foolish, I looked across at Brenda and saw her smiling at me. But oh, it was such a smile of triumph that transfigured her unfortunate features.

The room was filled with cats. There seemed to be hundreds of them milling around in the candlelight, but it was difficult to assess their exact number. Cats of every size and shape and color, squeezing into the room and nuzzling at the battered aluminum plates filled with scraps.

They ate with quiet desperation. There was no fighting among them, no spitting, no jealousy. They bowed their heads and went to their task with precision, concentrating on the feast Brenda had prepared for them and not looking up until they had finished.

As the food warmed their bellies they began to purr. Those who finished first climbed into her lap, or rubbed themselves against her where she sat on the cold brick floor. Something rich and warm passed between them and at last I understood the nature of the ritual she had allowed me to share.

I watched her sitting there like an island surrounded by her ocean of cats, and I could feel the ancient room fill with love and affection. I could have reached out and touched it, the feeling seemed so intense, but an old fear forestalled this honest impulse. So I just stared, watching her stroke their furry backs as they crowded into her lap and listened to her crooning softly in answer to their deep purring. In time the entire room seemed to be reverberating to this sepulchral breath of pleasure, and I felt suddenly lost and out of place.

A few latecomers prowled around the perimeter, looking for some scraps. Brenda shook her head sadly. "I'm sorry," she said to them. "There just wasn't enough to go round this time. Maybe by the end of the week . . ." But her voice had a pitiful quality. She watched them licking disconsolately at the plates and I knew that, if it had been possible, she would have moved heaven and earth to ensure that they, too, had full bellies that night. But all she had been able to do was to cage a small bag filled with scraps . . .

She must have felt my eyes upon her, for she looked across and shrugged. "Gets harder all the time," she

(Continued on page 54)

THE GHOSTS OF EARTH

by Robert Hoskins





Eschscholzia was dying. The bright orange petals were fading toward a sickly yellow-gray, the satiny surface rough and curling at the tips. The whole tray of California poppies seemed to be affected; Curran's fingers moved quickly through the compacted mass of bottom matter and stripped away the blossoms until there were only two left. These he lifted carefully, holding them up to the light, checking for any sign of the rot. He could not be sure, but the leaves seemed to be off-color; he groped for his knife and trimmed the top six inches of the stems, carrying the two flowers over to the worktable. The holograph equipment was already set up; it was the work of no more than seconds to position them first singly, and then together, capturing their three-dimensional images forever.

Perfume hung heavy in the plant room, the air warm enough to coat the man's almost translucent skin with a film of perspiration. His naked chest and arms were covered with a network of wiry gray curls, and now that the important task of capturing the final image of *Eschscholzia californica* was safely done, his fingers began again their slight palsied tremor. He removed the cartridge from the camera to take later to the print lab, and turned away from the scene of his latest failure.

The constant tone of the starship's life systems vibrated unheard through the steel decking as Curran left the plant room, the two poppies forgotten behind him on the worktable. Behind him were long rows of the plant tables, waist high for the convenience of the men intended to work here. The tubing and piping carrying the nutrient bath from the chemical factories that depended from midship in their own private globe cluster tended to spill from the carefully ordered array beneath the tables, but the old man stepped over them with the ease of long familiarity.

He paused in the narrow corridor to orient himself, then moved a hundred yards to the nearest lift shaft, stepping through the narrow portal to grab the up cable and ride with it to the center of the ship. He had entered at the tenth ring; by the time the cable carried him halfway to the central shaft the gravity had lessened to the point where a stronger man would have needed no more than his handhold. In recognition of his ebbing strength, however, Curran kept his legs wrapped around the cable until they were almost into null-grav. Only then did he release his hold, kicking into the central shaft to swim toward the green glow of the control room, almost a mile distant.

Curran as always felt like Alice as he

fell through the heart of the starship, the multicolored symbols slipping by him like the cabinets and cupboards that lined the rabbit hole. He closed his eyes, imagining that he could see the twisting tell of the hurrying White Rabbit far ahead... and opened them again in time to reach out and grab one of the braking nets. He crabbed the last hundred feet to the umbilicus that separated the control blister from the rest of the ship, easing himself through the tight-fitting flexible shaft. As always he consciously ignored the warning symbols spaced evenly around this end of the shaft, glowing red to mark the rooms of the dead.

Once through, he drifted, slowly to the central command node, capturing a strap and fastening himself lightly in the couch. For a moment he lay still, fingers dancing a gently possessed tune as he summoned his energy; then he checked the monitor bank to see if there were other urgencies anywhere in the onion-skin clusters that made up the starship chain. All telltales were green, signifying peace among the many worlds that carried the final selected flora of planet Earth.

Nothing requiring the attention of the sole living human passenger, Curran sighed, eyes closing lightly. He was aware of a small ache in the hollow of his gut that signified hunger, but the need was not pressing. He ignored the ache, drifting into a light sleep that was peopled with dreams of a planet twenty-seven years into his past...

And persons twenty-seven years dead.

The strident clamor of long-silent alarms brought him abruptly from sleep. He stared at the blinking lights before his eyes and around him, a glowing strip pulsing insistently in the center of the monitor immediately before him. The white letters were warning him to secure position for powered flight, and below that, winking numbers counted away the seconds, slipping now below the five minute mark.

Curran reached out to touch a control and the picture in the monitor abruptly shifted, showing the glowing disc of a visible sun, starkly bright to eyes unused to brilliance of any intensity. The scene shifted again, the sun image damped now to a bearable degree, receding rapidly to little more than a winking point at the side of the screen. Now the picture was rushing forward again, the sun slipping away from the camera perspective, and then the tiny disc-point of a greenish planet swelled larger than its neighboring light sources. The colored changed to a

silver-blue as the planet became a distinctively marked globe, the alarms continuing to sound as the computers of the ship prepared to end the twenty-seven year voyage, intending for orbit about the planet.

The screen went black for an instant, returning with the warning sign and the counting clock, dropping now from sixty seconds. In almost-forgotten response Curran's fingers moved to tighten the belt around his waist—and then his ears were filled with the rumble of a suddenly-rushing cataract, and pressure descended upon his aged organs, bringing with it pain and vision that was quickly clouded by the red of blood suddenly sluggish against the retinal nerve. He became mercifully unconscious before the threshold of his diminished tolerance overcame him.

The starship ignored him, the very structure seeming to shudder as it took on a new vibration, the great star engines once more brought to life. To a stationary watcher, the long chain of jet pearls moved ponderously against the stellar background, and then the engines cut off once more. The process was slow; sometime later the engines fired again, and then again. After several hours the change in the ship's course in relation to the orbit of the distant planet was apparent, but many days would pass before there was a significant change in final attitude. But the intersection of the two paths was already guaranteed.

Within the ship, silence returned, although it was not a total silence: the great vessel still rotated about its axis string, bringing a measure of gravity to the marching levels of decks and holds. The computers continued to work, monitoring the thousands of life varieties among the cargo of plant species and variatals. The unfiring central brain of the ship also continued to watch over the one animal passenger—and now the medical sensors determined that Curran's condition required treatment. A probe appeared from beneath the couch, reaching up until its heat sensors found the presence of human flesh, then touching the man to deposit its measure of mechanical concern. A stimulant followed, and the old man opened his eyes to see again on the screen before him the globe of the planet. He stared at it until a sensor in one of the cargo holds detected a malfunction in a nutrient distribution terminal, a clotting of the plant life bloodstream, and sounded a bell to warn him. The monitor immediately forgot the approaching planet; Curran's hands fumbled with his strap as he noted the location of the trouble. He

kicked off the couch, heading for the umbilicus, responding to the call of duty.

It might have been days or even months later when the stident alarm sounded again, catching Curran in the process of drawing a dinner from the kitchen slot. He had forgotten the planet by this time, forgotten it with the other dimming memories of middle and late life. He could still remember the far past, a boyhood in the teeming tenements along the shores of Lake Ontario: those days were crisp and fresh-cut, feces and smells and impressions as sharp as at the instant of implanting. In his mind he had been chasing again across the rooftops of his block-sector, following one of his cubemates on some mindless errand. It was a hot day, the smog kept from smothering the city only by the power of the forced-air ventilators mounted on every rooftop. He had just cut around the bulk of one of those, chasing dangerously close to feel the hot wind pull the sweat from his near-naked body—when he jumped the parapet to the neighboring building, and landed on top of a sleeping man and woman. Startled more than frightened, the boy was away before the man could catch breath and reach out to grab him... but he would never forget the feel of the woman's soft breasts against his legs...

Startled by the alarm, Curran looked about the control room, fighting for orientation. The dinner had nearly slipped from his fingers; now he picked it out of the air and placed it in a holding slot, long-ago ingrained reaction sending him to his couch to strap down. His heart was pounding heavily, as much at the disruption of his dream moment as because of the activity of the ship. The couch extruded a sedative, calming him, although not putting him back to sleep.

The adjustments were minor this time, most of the calculations the first time accurate enough to need no more than the tiniest of refinements to slip the ship into orbit ten planetary diameters out. The pressure clutched at Curran's heart, but lasted only brief seconds; and now the computer could divert its entire attention from directing the ship to the ancillary task of searching the communication channels. A call signal blanketed the planet below, and was captured by another electronic consciousness: the monitor before the man dissolved into the image of a bullet-headed functionary who seemed bored with his task.

"State identity, origin, business."

Curran's throat worked a time or two before something that might have been



words cracked from his dry lips. The man in the monitor blinked after a perceptible pause, and scowled. He repeated his question as the couch extruded a flask of energy-restoring liquid to the old man. He sipped at the nipple, working his mouth until all tissues were wet, and then again essayed speech.

"Starship *Star Ark*," he managed now, his voice rusty from long disuse—how many years had it been since he had given up talking to himself? "Origin, Earth. Requesting assistance of planetary authorities in discharging and landing of cargo."

"Nature of cargo?"

"Full catalogue of surviving Earth eco-system flora."

This time the pause before the other responded was longer than necessary for transmission of the message from ship to planet to ship again. He blinked once more, and glanced at something or someone out of Curran's view at the side of the screen.

"One moment." The picture dissolved.

It was more like twenty minutes before the monitor came to life again; in the meantime, Curran retrieved his dinner. He was just finishing the last of the

sweet when the screen corruscated and settled into the image of another person, one more dignified and obviously highplaced than the first.

"*Star Ark*, please state the nature of your business."

"To rescue so far as possible the surviving species of Earth's flora," said Curran, reciting as though by rote. "May I have assistance in landing my cargo?"

"What would you do with it?"

"Why... transplant it into hospitable soil!" He was amazed that the question could even be asked.

"How many of you are there?"

"Only myself."

"Only one, to crew a long sleep ship?" The man's eyebrows raised.

"I am the only survivor. There were forty of us, but the long sleep machinery malfunctioned. My three watch mates were killed when an electrical fire trapped them in one of the holds. The family tulipa was also destroyed."

The man stroked at his point of chin whiskers, seeming to stare into Curran's eyes. At last he raised a shoulder, saying, "Do you have a cutter?"

"Yes—several. Four, I believe."

"That would be useful. Key for landing coordinates—you will be welcomed at our port."

"What about my cargo?"

"We will discuss that after you have landed."

The night terminator was fleeing the sun as Curran's cutter came in low over the spacecraft. He scanned the ground for the surrounding city, but there was nothing but great fields of bright colors, orange and purple and an iridescent blue. As the ship dropped closer the scanners showed that the fields were rippling under the effect of a breeze, the coloration, vegetation.

The port came up then, a wide area of blackened concrete with a single cluster of low buildings huddling in one corner. Even as he settled Curran saw that there were only two stubby ships resting there, neither of them more than twice as large as his own cutter, which was designed to carry a maximum of twelve passengers from ship's orbit to a planetary surface.

He landed a mile away from the buildings and a moment later a small groundcar came out to meet him, the reckless driver squealing tire fabric as Curran undogged his lock. The driver was alone, and waiting impatiently for him to get down, a task even under the .9 gravitational pull of the planet. A chill wind was whipping across the ground as he pulled himself into the car, the driver taking off even before he had a chance to settle himself, depositing him a moment later before the largest of the buildings. There, the man who had spoken to him was waiting.

Curran expected the other to welcome him into the building, but instead a larger ground car was drawing up. The man wrapped his cloak more tightly about his shoulders and moved into the wind, then turned to see the old man holding back. He gestured impatiently, and Curran came.

"Unpleasant place!" he said, once they were settled into the rear seat and the car was moving. "I avoid it whenever I can. Fortunately you are the first visitor in over three years."

He studied Curran openly, the old man was nervous. "Tell me, what brought you to leave Earth on such a mad mission?"

"Earth is dying—"

"Earth is dead," the other cut in. "At least, there have been no broadcasts of interstellar strength for the past ten or twelve years."

The old man nodded. "Dead, then. There were those of us who felt that we should do what we could to save as much of Earth as we could. Perhaps it does not seem like much, but we—my friends and I—gathered every specimen of plant that we could locate in the

remaining natural gardens. The arboreta of course were abandoned—there is no room, even in a long sleep ship, for full-grown living trees, for the nutrients that would be needed to make up their bodies. But we brought the ferns, the ground cover bushes, junipers in most of its forms."

"But...why?" He spread his hands. "Why here? Oh, I know—we're the closest to Earth, so naturally you made the first stop here. But what made you think that we would want Earth's plant life?"

Curran sat in the small park, warmed by the noon hour sun. He had been coming here every day for the two weeks that he had been in the capitol city—if a village of a few thousands could be the capitol of a planet. There were young children in the park, some of them staring idly at the man who had come from old Earth. But most of them were used to him by now, and ran past him in their noisy games without noting his skinny frame.

He was slumped forward, hands clasped between his knees, although from time to time he glanced skyward as though expecting to see something—to see ships materialize. He still had not accepted that the starworlds were almost out of contact with each other.

"Oh, there are a few who don't mind the disorientation of discontinuous time-lives," said Juyles, the man who had met him at the spacecraft. "The twenty colonized worlds need some contact, if only to spread technological advances. But none of us are overcrowded, or feel the need to advance just to pull ourselves out of the mess of today."

Curran was in Juyles' home, where he had been ever since landing. "Are there no more long sleep ships in service?"

"It's possible, although I know of none. None of the first starworlds have reached the point of population pressure, so there's no need to expand further, even though the computers have pinpointed thousands of probable terraform-potential systems."

Juyles was compassionate, although he felt awkward in the old man's presence. "Look here, Curran—I suppose emotionally I can understand your wanting to save what you could of Earth. After all, it is the planet of your birth. But what makes you think that the starworlds would welcome reminders of a planet now dead, that they fled two and three centuries ago? This planet has been settled ten generations now, and while it's true that the first generation brought Earth food grains and fruits

with them, they quickly discovered that the effort was unnecessary. This world is fecund, and already offers every possible variant of food-producing plant and meat-edible animals. Within ten years the Earth grains were ripped out."

"Did they hate Earth so much, then?" "I suppose some of them may have hated, yes. Others wanted only to adapt to the new home environment as quickly as possible."

"But...Earth is the planet of birth! Man evolved there!"

"You speak of sentiment, which I suppose has its place. But you forget the type of people who crewed the long sleep ships. They were escaping Earth's inadequacies, the crowding, the shortage of air to breathe, land to move around in, even food to eat. They mortgaged their heritage on that planet to buy passage away from it. What sort of sentiment should they—we—hold?"

Juyles did not understand, and Curran could not understand the psychology of these people—the natives of this world. They were natives now, after so many generations on the surface. Oh, there was limited travel to the other worlds of the system, to extract valuable minerals that were in short supply here at home—but to remove as many reminders of the home world as they could, even the long sleep ship had been cut apart, converted to planet-bound uses.

He was welcome to stay, there was no problem on that score. They welcomed the wealth of the starship—and would destroy it. They would not, however, permit him to bring his precious cargo down to the surface.

He became aware of the tall youth standing a distance away, watching him. There was a girl with him, and Curran smiled at them.

"Come," he said, patting the bench beside him. "I won't bite. Come and sit."

They came cautiously, sat down nervously, the youth watching from the corner of his eyes. He imitated Curran's stance by clasping his hands.

"What are your names?" the old man asked.

"I am Lai Kan," the boy replied. "This is Thai."

"Good morning, Lai Kan and Thai." He nodded gravely. "May I be of service?"

"You are the man from Earth." There was no need to answer; it was not a question. But it was the first evidence of curiosity that Curran had met.

"Yes. Would you like to ask about Earth?"

"Oh, no!" Lai-Kan seemed startled. "We know about Earth—we have the

(Continued on page 55)

FORECASTING THE FUTURE FOR FUN AND PROFIT

by Frederik Pohl

It is well known that we science-fiction writers have squatter's rights on the future, not because we bought it from anyone who was empowered to sell; but because we have occupied it for a long time, and, we systematically mine out "predictions".

It is absolutely true that there have been a lot of these predictions, and taken together, they make an astonishingly accurate record. Television, radar and a host of other electronic marvels we now take for granted were described, more or less precisely, half a century ago by Hugo Gernsback, in works like *Ralph 124C41+*. Jules Verne predicted the ocean-going submarine in such detail, in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, that there is a hard-dying legend that when early submariners began to build the things, they were denied patents on some features of their inventions because Verne's writing had made them public domain.

Naturally, space travel belonged exclusively to science fiction publications, not only in the fiction pieces. The basic courses all spacecraft must follow between the planets—the "Hohmann" orbits—were first published in non-fiction form in this country in *Wonder Stories* during the early 1930s. Science-fiction fans and writers named all the early rocket experimenting groups in America, England and Germany. And the stories, of course, were full of space travel, much of it quite close in detail to NASA and Soviet real experiences: the spacesuits worn by astronauts and cosmonauts today could have readily appeared on the cover of *Amazing* or *Astounding* forty years ago. I'm speaking of manned space travel, but the history is equally persuasive for the instrumented variety. Professor Jameson launched one out of his back yard in *The Jupiter Satellite* more than forty years ago (not to mention, such oddities as *The Brick Moon*, half a century earlier still). Arthur C. Clarke described the modern communications satellite in 1945, but even before him, in *Venus Equilateral* and

other stories, George O. Smith had shown what a communications satellite might be like.

A lot of this, of course, is not so much prediction but a sort of information transfer: science-fiction writers became aware of scientific possibilities long before the general public, and so seized on them for story purposes before most people had become aware of what was happening. But that does not quite explain the record on atomic energy. H.G. Wells wrote about it shortly after the turn of the century, in *The World Set Free*, and it became a staple of science fiction almost at once. To scientists it was not yet clear that it was a real possibility. Not even to Albert Einstein, who went on record as late as 1933 to say that the practical value of atomic energy was non-existent "because you will always have to put more energy into the reaction than you get out of it." (At around the same time, John W. Campbell was writing *When the Atoms Failed*, a story which took atomic power so much for granted that it was discussing the power source that would follow it!)

A few years later Hahn and Meitner showed that there were ways of speeding up the rate of radioactive decay—by means of "slow neutrons"—and the feasibility of at least an atomic bomb became clear enough for the United States government to launch the Manhattan Project; but before Hiroshima, writers like Robert A. Heinlein (*Blowups Happen*) and Lester del Rey (*Nerves*) had long since jumped into the world of atomic generating plants, like the one which provides the power for my typewriter as I write this.

Well, that's not so hard to do, is it? To take some possibility and pretend it is a reality, for the sake of a story? But if that is all there is to it, what can we make of the astonishing hits of detail? A decade and a half before Commander Armstrong landed on the Moon, Lester del Rey published a juvenile science-fiction novel which opens with the words: "The first spaceship landed on the moon, and Commander Armstrong stepped out."

And there is the puzzling case of Jonathan Swift.

Swift published *Gulliver's Travels* in 1726. It contains a throwaway line, in the section which deals with the voyage to Laputa, flying island inhabited by flakey philosophers, that states the planet Mars has two moons. Indeed it does; but in 1726 no one was supposed to know that. The moons were not officially discovered until Asaph Hall in Washington D.C. pointed his telescope at Mars in the close conjunction of 1877.

Good guess. But there is even a better one in the same book. When Gulliver goes to Lilliput, the tiny inhabitants ponder over the question of how much to feed him. They make a mathematical calculation based on the law that the food requirement of an animal is proportional to the $\frac{3}{4}$ power of the animal's body weight. That's a fine law; it is basic physiological science, and accepted by everyone—but it was not discovered until 1932!

Of course, one can see how these things might have happened. Del Rey chose "Armstrong" as an all-American name, and it is my personal conviction that NASA, in its unswerving effort to make plastic dolls out of the astronauts, had exactly that same consideration in mind when they picked their first crew for lunar landing. And it is possible that some astronomers—Swift knew a few of them—might have observed Mars's moons a century and a half before Hall. (But if so, why did they keep quiet about it?) More likely, Swift was just engaged in neatening the universe up. It was known that Venus had no moon, the Earth had one; ever since Galileo, Jupiter was credited with four. Mars, between Earth and Jupiter, on aesthetic grounds alone, might as well be given two to make the geometric progression tidy. (It now turns out that Jupiter has a lot more than four moons, but Swift didn't know that.) And Kepler's Law? Call it a lucky guess . . .

But they are interesting lucky guesses, all the same.

I am now prepared to reveal a closely-held trade secret: how we

science-fiction writers make these incredibly exact predictions.

It is done by what I call the "broken clock method"—from the old French saying, "Even a broken clock is right twice a day." The tally of how many SF predictions turned out right is interesting, but it isn't a patch on the number of SF predictions that turned out totally, horribly wrong.

I don't like to embarrass my friends by referring to them by name, so I will not mention the many predictions that the U.S. (or the world) will be destroyed by nuclear war in 1948, 1956, 1963 or a dozen other years already past (it is always a mistake to put dates into a science fiction story!). Nor will I describe the stories which talked about aerial transportation as a going concern half a century ago, but had the quaint notion that the aircraft would be Zeppelins, ornithopters, triplanes or curious semi-sailing vessels made operative by the workings of "Fleury's ray." It's true we have atomic power. But we didn't get it by using superheavy artificial isotopes (as in *Nerves*), or by spilling a little waste slop on a chunk of copper, as Richard Ballinger Seaton had it in E.E. Smith's *The Skylark of Space*.

All these predictions, and thousands and thousands of others, were, face it, wrong. They didn't happen. They aren't ever going to happen, at least not at the times or in the ways specified by the authors. And the reputation of science fiction for predicting future events turns out to be not very impressive, considered as a batting average; for every right prediction, there are many, many more that weren't right at all.

So what (you may ask) becomes of the reputed value of SF as a guide to the future?

It is (I answer) higher than ever!

Predicting the future isn't a parlor game. There isn't any "score". In fact, the more accurate and complete a prediction, the less value it has!

To show why this is so, let us perform an Einsteinian "mind experiment". Let us go then, you and I, to the parlor of a Gypsy tea-leaf reader. She looks deep into our cups, catches her breath, recoils. "I see," she says, tremulously, "an immense truck coming down the street! I see you two going out the door, stepping off the curb and—*kerblow!* You're both instantly dead. And," she says with calm professional assurance, "since this is a fully guaranteed money-back prediction, there is no way you can change it. You're going out that door, and you're going to get killed. Please pay before you leave."

The point of the experiment is, supposing the prediction is all she says it is, correct and unchangeable—what use is it?

The answer is, *no use at all*. To know exactly and completely what is going to happen is worth nothing. It isn't even worth knowing the name of the winner in the third race at Aqueduct tomorrow, if the prediction is complete; because a complete prediction would also contain the information as to whether or not you had a bet on his nose.

Taken as a whole, science fiction does not tell you what will happen; what it does is spread before you the entire spectrum of things that *may* happen. It tells you about worlds devastated by nuclear warfare, or joyous and alive with peace between nations and among peoples; it shows you good futures and bad ones, explains their implications. It is a whole Sears-Roebuck catalogue of possible futures, and you select for yourself the ones you like, and act to encourage them, and the ones you despise, and act to avoid them. For the only value in knowing the future is the guidance it can give you as to your actions in that only moment of time where things are happening—the present.

Science-fiction writers aren't the only people in the world who do this. Think-tanks full of futurologists do the same thing in more formal and explicit ways, sometimes very successfully. Science fiction does it best. It presents its arguments in the form of stories, complete with characters; so you not only see what may happen, you see what its impact on people may be, as detailed, as fully fleshed-out and as powerfully as its writers can make it. (Which is sometimes very much so, and sometimes not really too impressive—not all SF is good! Any more than all of ANYTHING is good; there is shoddy merchandise in every field of endeavor.)

As leading futurologist Dennis Gabor says, "You can't predict the future, you can only invent it." Reading science fiction helps us to know what our options can be, after that, the invention of the reality that will be tomorrow is up to us.

You can only invent it....

Science fiction has, in fact, invented a good many futures. It hasn't stopped at describing things that may come to pass—it has played a significant role in making some of them come true.

Some of the futures it has invented are trivial enough, as small as one man's choice of a career: the chief chemist for the National Bureau of Standards invented his own future out of a science-fiction story. When he was a young boy he read *The Skylark of Space*. In it, the hero, Richard Ballinger Seaton, was a chemist for the NBS and the youngster allowed as how that looked to be an interesting life's work,

so he decided to pursue it... and did. A few years later, a Boy Scout named Robert Duncan Enzmann listened to his scout leader's campfire stories with great interest. The stories were all about interplanetary travel (not surprising; the scoutmaster was Harry Stubbs, better known to SF readers as Hal Clement), and young Bob Enzmann decided he would like to help build the spaceships that could make those stories come true; and he did. He is now a scientist employed by a major research company, and one of the tasks he performs is devising drives for interstellar vehicles.

And there is the famous case of Leo Szilard. He read the Wells novel of atomic power, *The World Set Free*, in 1932. In October of the next year he was driving down London's Southampton Row and, waiting for a traffic light to change, he thought about the novel, and about the potential reality of atomic energy—and there and then decided it could be made real, and that he would devote his career to making it happen, which he did, on his own and as a leading member of the Manhattan Project.

I have met at least a hundred scientists, many of them world leaders in their fields, who found their first impetus toward careers in science as readers of science fiction. A fair number of them have spent time trying to work out with hardware some of the inventions science-fiction writers made on paper.

But there are other ways in which science fiction invents its futures. One of them took place in July, 1975.

There was a science-fiction novel by Martin Caidin, called *Marooned*. It concerned two spaceships in orbit around the Earth, a Russian and an American. One ship gets into trouble, and its crew is rescued by the other. It was not an astonishingly inventive science-fiction story, but it had important repercussions. In the fullness of time it was made into the movie of the same title, and eventually that movie was seen by an audience that included some Russian leaders of the Soviet space program, its theme of Soviet-American cooperation warmed their hearts, and one of them said to the others, "That's only a movie, of course. But if the Americans do think that way, or at least some of them do, then... maybe..."

And so, they made an informal suggestion to NASA. NASA picked it up with joy, made it formal, and both agencies put it into practice. It happened in July, 1975: the Apollo-Soyuz linkup in space.

And it was a science-fiction story that made it happen. ★

*It is called Kleiber's Law. Max Kleiber himself, in 1967, pointed out that swift had preceded him by two full centuries.



SPACE

THE REAL GOAL FOR MANKIND

by Stephen Goldin

We are standing on the threshold of the most exciting era mankind has ever witnessed. Men have traveled to the Moon and millions of us back here on Earth accompanied them vicariously via television. Before too much longer, other men will be strolling across the craters of Mars and trekking through Venus's poisonous hell. Mankind will spread itself from Mercury past giant Jupiter and all the way to the frozen wastes of Pluto. Nor will we stop there, because the stars are calling and we must answer.

These accomplishments will not come easily, however, for we are also on the brink of the most confusing assemblage of chaos and disarray ever to befall the human race. The major military powers of the world are continually threatening one another with a war that can have no innocent bystanders. Men of different religions or colors or ethnic backgrounds are prepared to mix their differences with blood. Other people want things that have been too long denied them. Crime has risen well beyond epidemic proportions. We are shouting more and listening less. Taking more and giving less. Men trust other men with great reluctance, and only when necessary. People are starving while others don't care.

It would be foolish to try to pick a single cause and say, "This is the reason why society is falling apart," because there are hundreds of reasons. These myriad factors combine and interrelate to form the baffling array of problems that confronts us today. Similarly, no one answer will solve all our problems. But for the purposes of this article, I will limit myself to a single problem: the problem of differences.

A society—be it a nation, state, city or club—is founded on the principle of similarity. All its members are expected to work harmoniously together and share common interests. The larger the number of these common interests, the more close-knit and smooth-running the society will be. When all the members think essentially the same way and want primarily the same thing, all goes well for the group as a whole. But problems are bound to arise when a society's constituents differ on methods or aims.

The problem today is that people are emphasizing their own uniqueness. More and more, they are shunning anything they might have in common with anyone else. It is the Age of the Individual, at the expense of the group. I am not saying that this is wrong, but it does lead to complications for our traditional way of life. Everyone is pulling his own share of the load, but there is no common goal in sight and each man pulls in a separate way. Nothing can be accomplished, because the people lack a sense of direction.

No man can work without a goal. Like a carpenter with a new set of tools, he may not have the exact specifications of what he is working towards when he sets out, but a general idea of what he is doing must be imbedded somewhere in his mind. If he is going to build a cabinet, he at least has some idea of the size and shape required. But without a definite sense of purpose he can't even begin. His craft is without meaning, and his tools and training are wasted. If he cannot think of anything worthwhile to do, he will not do anything worthwhile.

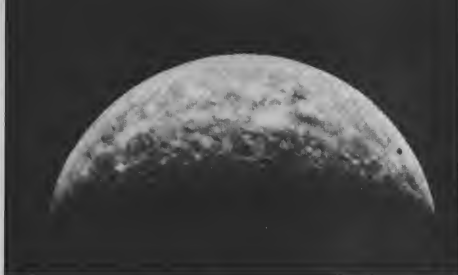
That simple tautology explains a lot about the factors operating on the

human race today, for what is true about men is also true about Man. Societies also need a sense of direction, some common bond to hold together all the people that compose them. Common goals provide the glue that holds the framework of the society together. They present a target at which all the constituents can aim. With everyone pointed in the same direction, progress and harmony come easier.

At the simplest cultural level, where society is composed of a loose agglomeration of individuals, the goals need only be as basic as trying to stay alive. For the majority of people in the world today, the attainment of this simple goal requires all their efforts. They work in their own fields so that they can raise enough food for their families to eat and a little more to trade for other necessities. Social organization is slight or nonexistent and no social goals are needed. The individual's fight for survival taken up all his time and is shared by all his neighbors.

For those of us in the United States and other industrial nations, however, this simple mode of existence isn't enough. There is no longer any challenge to staying alive. The vast majority of people in this country have few worries about where to find food or clothing or shelter from the rain. Mere survival has ceased to be a goal for us—it is an accomplished fact. We can't work towards something we already have, and so more complex aims are required.

Ever since survival ceased to be of primary concern to men, they have searched for new goals to work towards. As societies grew more com-



plex, they required common goals to bind their members together. Throughout history, war has provided Man with his most effective social goal. People band together in the face of a common enemy because their survival has been threatened and action must be taken. The goal here is also simple—defeat the enemy and secure survival. People will endure tremendous hardships, even starvation and death, if it is for the common good. Civilians submit to rationing of supplies. Soldiers lay down their lives to aid their country's cause. If surviving the ravages of Nature is the primary goal for individuals, then proving superiority over other groups, generally by means of warfare, has until now been the primary goal of societies.

But war is no longer practical. Our own ingenuity has perfected it a little too well, and the odds are that by defeating an enemy with today's nuclear weapons we should also be defeating ourselves. The nations of the world have slowly come to realize that, although they still hate their enemies' guts, they had better learn to get along with them. In this way, the traditional source of social unity has gradually ebbed and is now holding us in the loosest of grips.

There are other "natural" processes that bring society members together: catastrophes such as flood, fire, famine, and pestilence. In the face of these crises, people go out of their way to help the victims. Their loss is a sorrow everyone can feel. But such catastrophes are becoming less and less

frequent as our abilities to control them increase. We no longer have to spend all our time fighting to stay alive and we no longer dare to have powerful enemies. The traditional goals for both individuals and societies have been taken from us, leaving us in a purposeless vacuum.

But society is made up of too many individual units to hold together without some cohesive force operating effectively. We are witnessing the breakdown today in our own culture. If the large superstructure doesn't have enough to hold a person's interest, he will turn to a smaller group where he does have something in common with the other members. Political parties, motorcycle gangs, hobby clubs and bowling teams are all examples of organizations that offer their members shared interests and common goals. They operate like miniature societies in and of themselves, generating fierce loyalty among their members and even approximating war with rival groups. More and more people are looking to these minicultures to supply what society in general is increasingly denying them: a commonality of purpose. And so blacks form their own subunits to oppose the whites because they feel that the goals of the two races are dissimilar. Women organize against men and youth rebels against age, all because it is easier today to see the differences and harder to see the similarities.

If our traditional sources of unity have failed us, then we will have to use our

wits to devise others. We've already had a small taste of precisely this sort of thing. On May 25, 1961, President John F. Kennedy proposed a national purpose—the landing of men on the Moon before the end of that decade. At the time, it sounded like hopeless idealism to most people. Nobody knew precisely what they wanted to do or how they were going to accomplish that feat. But it was a goal, one that lifted Man's eyes up from the ground and showed him the stars. It said, "These can be yours if you want them badly enough."

For eight years, men worked. It was more than just the aerospace industry that was affected. The goal that President Kennedy had set was subtly infiltrating the spirit of the nation. The toy industry had a field day designing space toys to plant this new frontier into the minds of the children. By putting the future into such concrete form, it accustomed youngsters to think in terms of space exploration. And, should any adult momentarily forget where the country was aiming, another manned space shot quickly reminded him. Men worked, men sweated, men died in order to turn that dream into a reality.

On July 20, 1969, it happened. Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin landed on the Moon. It was a day of overwhelming historic importance, but more than that, it was a day of overwhelming pride. We had done it, something that had never been done before. National unity was at a high point.

And yet, there were still divisive



forces within the country. On July 20, 1969 there was still prejudice against minority groups. Women were still considered second-class citizens. Malnutrition was rife in many areas of the country. Carbon monoxide filled the air, while industrial wastes filled the water. But these things didn't seem to matter quite as much that day. There was a feeling that infected everyone, a feeling of accomplishment. A national adventure had been completed.

There has been an emptiness in the air since then, a hollowness in our social soul. The space program has dribbled on listlessly, a ghost of its former self. There has been no Goal toward which to work, nothing to set fire to our spirits and send our minds soaring to new heights. What was once our goal has now become our measuring stick. How many times have you heard, "We can send a man to the Moon, but we can't do this-and-such"? As a nation, our hopes have flown to the Moon, a quarter of a million miles up. But that is a long way for them to fall back down again.

To be sure, a lot of substitute goals have been suggested. The elimination of silly and dangerous prejudices so that social opportunities can be equalized. The control of disease. The reduction of world population. The eradication of crime and poverty. The protection of our environment. These, and others, have been proposed as common efforts for our nation and the world. And indeed, we all have an important stake in each of these ventures, because they affect all our lives in some way.

I have no intention of demeaning these goals. All of them are extremely important, and will have to be resolved in one way or another if men are to continue living on this planet. But not one has caught hold and inflamed the public's imagination. They remain goals, with a small "g". As such, they must be worked towards until they are accomplished to reasonable satisfaction. But we cannot give our hearts fully to them. They have not become Goals.

Why not? Because they are all negative. They all involve stopping something that already exists, rather than creating something new and fresh. If they are successful at all, they will make themselves evident as a gradual disappearance of phenomena. People want positive results that they can see, hear, touch. Crime, prejudice and disease are annoyances from which we desperately need relief. But we never take notice of when an annoyance isn't bothering us, just as we never notice when the weatherman is right. We don't sigh with relief at night because we weren't robbed that day or because we didn't catch a cold. We don't beam with pride each time a day goes by without our displaying any prejudice.

It can feel just as good to empty one's bladder as to eat a delicious meal, but we can't look forward to the former with quite the same excitement as the latter. In the same way, we can't pursue negative goals with the same enthusiasm we have for positive ones. The negative goals may be desirable,

even necessary, but that is not sufficient to rouse the public from its inertia. A cure for cancer may be very humanitarian, but it is far from exciting. Except for biologists and medical researchers, most people find no adventure in matching wits with a virus.

Of the causes that I mentioned, the one that has gained the most support is the ecology crusade. But even this has not spurred people into dynamic action, again because it is not creative. It represents a two-pronged attack—first, to stop the pollution that is occurring daily and second, to restore the beauty that once was. But it cannot truly capture the spirits of men because it does not create anything. At best, it recreates. It is a holding action and even, in one sense, a retreat.

In order to be at peace with himself, Man needs frontiers. He needs to be able to release his excess energy by tackling a problem that is bigger than he is. He needs a challenge to his ingenuity, an opponent to fight, and if one is not at hand he will invent it out of whole cloth. For thousands of years, his opponent was Nature here on Earth in all her many devastating forms. When he began making headway against her, he took on his fellow Man. Both, for reasons stated earlier, have ceased to be feasible opponents. What, then, does that leave to us?

Though we may have tamed the natural forces on our own home planet, the rest of the Universe waits for us just above our thin shell of atmosphere. It lurks there, dark and mysterious. We

have, at great expense and effort, managed to make a few pinpricks in this enormous monster that stares down from the sky, wounds that the Universe, in its immensity, will never even notice. Here, then, is an adversary worthy of our talents.

Speaking scientifically, we have emerged from history with powers that will allow us to gain our every wish. There is not a single thing Man has ever really wanted that he cannot achieve either today or within the next couple of hundred years. There is no limit to what we can do if we try hard enough. We have only to use our tools in the proper manner.

What are our tools? The primary one is our intelligence. It is this feature that has allowed us to see beyond specifics to the basic principles on which our world works. It also allows us to translate back again from the general principles to a specific case which can better our lives. The other tool is the scientific method of asking questions and never really being satisfied with the answers. So more questions are asked, and those answers, too, are questioned in a never-ending process. And so it goes, with little bits of learning being picked up along the way.

With the use of these tools, we have developed a technology that is pressing deeper every second into the secrets of the Universe. It would take an encyclopedia merely to list all our technical accomplishments and the list would be outdated before it could see print, but I would like to touch very briefly on the highlights in four broad fields: software, hardware, physical and life sciences.

The software field is the realm of computers. There isn't an aspect of our lives that is not affected by computers somewhere along the line. They are an adjunct to the human brain that helps us solve problems faster, if not better. So many books have already been written about the impact of computers on society that to write anything more here would be superfluous. I mention them only because they are indispensable to Man's conquest of space. The Moon landing would have been an utter impossibility without computers. The billions of calculations for the orbital mechanics alone would have staggered a team of the best human mathematicians. Computers help design and test the missiles and the spacecraft, as well as play vital roles in guidance, tracking, and all other systems relating to spacecraft performance. As Man expands into the Universe, computers will be an essential part of his environment.

In the hardware department, spaceflight is undoubtedly the crowning achievement. It brings together many

diverse fields of specialization and imposes coherence. And, like all of Science, it builds on previous experience so that future spaceflights will be even easier. We have solved the major problem of spaceflight, that of keeping a man alive in the hostile environment of outer space as he travels from one planet to another. Future expeditions may have other problems to face, but that main one we know is conquerable.

But technology is more than spaceflight. Transportation, communications, agriculture and every other field of human endeavor are being constantly worked on, modified and improved with each new advance in technical development. And all of them will eventually contribute to Man's exploration of other worlds.

Meanwhile, the physical sciences are providing us with data at an ever-increasing rate. Astronomy is showing us what the Universe is about. Physics is taking the Universe apart to find out what makes it tick, while chemistry is putting it back together and recombining pieces to see if it can be made better. Geology, meteorology and the fledgling planetary physics are investigating the interrelations of the systems that compose a planet so that we are learning the inner workings of worlds. Much of the knowledge in all these fields is still theoretical, but that is not to say that it won't be put to practical use in the near future.

Just as significant, if sometimes less heralded, advances are being made in the life sciences. Medicine is conquering disease at a record clip. We may never be able to cure everything, but we will come awfully close. And what we can't cure, we will be able to replace. The word "transplant" is already commonly accepted; within a century, the operation itself will be just as common.

At the same time that medicine is making such gallant strides, the other life sciences are proceeding apace. Biologists, as well as studying the processes of living creatures, are deeply involved in discovering the nature of life itself. Geneticists are unraveling the code that explains why a being is the way it is. Ecologists are examining the relationships between and among living creatures in an effort to understand Nature's balance scales.

Of course, none of these branches of knowledge is independent of the others. Genetics, for instance, leans heavily on the latest advances in chemistry, while computers are essential to the operation of our more complex technology. A breakthrough in one field leads to improvements in all, and

the pace of learning constantly continues its acceleration.

One of the most important examples of interdisciplinary effort is the cybernetic organism—more commonly shortened to "cyborg." A cyborg is a physical combination of Man and Mechanism, joined together for some purpose. The most basic example is a man with a wooden leg. The artificial limb replaces a damaged real one and, often eliminates the need for mistakes. Many cyborgs today are people who have had electronic pacemakers—devices used to regulate heartbeat in cardiac patients—surgically implanted in their chests. Others are people in iron lungs or people who need artificial kidney machines. In the future, artificial parts will be so common that everyone will be a cyborg to some extent.

But there is more potential to the cyborg than the replacement of human parts. Cyborgs can lead to more efficiency and an enhancement of our lives. Many men think of their cars as an extension of themselves as they drive. Test pilots and astronauts must be as familiar with their instruments as they are with their own bodies. Workers with precision tools have to exhibit considerable dexterity in their use. How much better would it be if a man could plug himself directly into the machine and actually become the car, the aircraft, the lathe? Not only is increased accuracy to be achieved, but it will give people a more satisfying feeling to know that they themselves are moving down the road at a hundred miles an hour, or soaring through the air, or producing a finely carved artifact.

The cyborg is the next step in human evolution. It is the cyborg, rather than Man proper, that will conquer space. Man cannot accomplish that task without machines, and, whatever men and machines can do, cyborgs will do better because they are a closer union of the two. It is the cyborg to whom the future truly belongs.

I have spoken about the aimlessness of our society and the need for a sense of direction. I propose that the conquest of space be made a goal of the highest priority, not just for our nation but for the entire world. It is a challenge that is equal to the abilities of all Mankind and in addition is more moral and exciting than killing our fellow human beings. Man will expand outward into the Universe whether he does it as part of a conscious plan or not. It will just take longer if we refuse to do it as a coordinated effort, that's all. The difference is between moving forward purposefully with opened eyes and rushing blindly into the future. ★



LOVE AFFAIR WITH TEN THOUSAND SPRINGS

by R. A. Lafferty

Ranwick Sorgente, a primordial man, had been following the little stream upwards for about two hours before dawn. The stream had gone under, hopefully, its last road culvert, and now was climbing, steadily and backwards, in a withdrawing and snakey way. It was an easy and winding climb up layered rocks with their small cedar trees. Now, just before sun-up, he could hear the spring and its pegged both, and he knew that there would be something a little bit wrong with both of them, and that they would still be better than most right things found elsewhere.

The spring spoke a liquid greeting. And the pegged called out in words and ran down to meet him.

"Oh, what a funny looking man!" the pegged cried out, and she kissed him with a laughing sort of sopiness that was almost a slaver.

"Oh hi!" she said. "I always do that. It's my failing. Cliveden almost didn't marry me on account of it. 'Gad, what a slurpy woman!' he always says, but I can't kiss dry. I'm sloppy. I'm Crescencia Houseghost. My husband and I live in the lodge that belongs to the Bureau of Minerals. It has a laboratory and is wonderful. You don't mind if I'm slurpy, do you?" she asked, and she kissed him again.

"No, no," Ranwick said. "All springs are slurpy, and all peggeds of springs are slurpy too. We would not love you so much if you weren't."

"You love me then? And what is a pegged?"

"You are one, Crescencia. The nereids and the oreads and other nymphs, while not small, are mere woman-sized. The peggeds are of more heroic dimensions. You are a water colt, you are the spirit of a water-spring. You're the spirit of the spring just above us."

"But I don't even know where the spring is. I'm not allowed to remember it."

"Oh, you really do know. You've just forgotten. You met me here to bring me up to it."

Ranwick and Crescencia the pegged went hand in hand up the slippery and mossy green rocks in the cedar-scented early morning shade. Crescencia was barefoot. She was very strong, and she twice lifted Ranwick in her arms, laughing, and waded the stream with him. She, like all water-springs and all spring-spirits, was highly imperfect. She was wrapped in some sort of dressing robe over short pajamas. She was too tall and too angular, too bony, too large of hand and foot, too long of thigh and of arched neck. Her eyes were just a little bit awry; one of them was slightly crossed. Her mouth was always

crooked with its smile, and there was ever a trickle of saliva or spring water at one corner of it.

With sparkling suddenness they came to the spring right at the break of dawn.

"It is perfect," Crescencia said as they came up to it, and she was wrong. It was as little perfect as she was herself. It came out of the ground lop-sided. It formed a pool that was ledged and bottomed and clear for six feet of its width, and then dropped off into green darkness and apparently considerable depth on the other half. No more than half of the water coming out of the gushing spring was overflowing the pool to tumble down the rock-layered hills. Some of it was finding another channel down inside the hill again, to come out at still another level somewhere below.

Crescencia was breast-deep in the pool of the spring, belonging there. "You love it, don't you?" she asked old Ranwick. "That part of it doesn't have



any bottom. You love all springs, don't you? How many? Do they all have names?"

"About ten thousand of them, I believe. Yes, each one has its name, and each pegged."

"How long?"

"Oh, fifty years I've been having these affairs with them. I only regret that I didn't seek them out sooner."

"And they are all so perfect?"

"No. None of them is. The best ones are shockingly imperfect."

"Do you ever feel that you are the first person who has come onto one?"

"I used to feel it. I would like to feel it, but it is no longer possible. They are all faithless. They have all been had before. They are all strumpets. Every one of them is second-hand."

"Oh no."

"Oh yes, Crescencia. That's the part that we have to live with. I ask 'Who was with you here before me', and the springs just smile with their crooked smiles, as you do."

"I forget who was here with me before you. I will go and wake my husband now." She came sopping out of the pool. "I will start the breakfast. Then you come down to breakfast in a very little while. You can see the roof of our lodge right there. Count when the spring has gushed one thousand gallons, and then come."

"Maybe I will forget to come," Ranwick said. "I will sit by a new spring for hours sometimes and forget the world. What then?"

"Oh, I will send my husband for you if you don't come. And if you don't come with him, then I will come back and take you up on me and bring you down there. And you be faithful while I'm gone." The pegged Crescencia kissed Ranwick Sorgente again with a splashy smooch and then ran down the green-stone slopes like a filly colt. Too leggy, that one. Was anyone ever so leggy? And she wasn't very young. Rough, rank, yellow hair was on her head as on a shaggy bay pony, a very high standing one. All the peggeds were so.

Ranwick enjoyed the gushy small spring which was really quite loud at this short range, and he tried to place the spring with her kindred. All the springs share a sort of cousinship, but there are degrees of kindred. She was a bit like Iron Mountain Spring which would always remain as a type. There was the sexiness of the iron-water sparkling in the daylight, and there was flint-stone denseness and mockery in the crooked grin of the spring. Ranwick could feel the mist-water on his face and hands. He could smell the brittle and blue skin of the snake-doctor dragon flies as they hovered over this new-hatched pool. He could empathize with the shock of this born-blind water breaking out of its underground darkness to its first dazzling daylight, and he could hear interior rocks being rattled by the resonance of the tumbling water.

"But you did not wait for me," Ranwick told the deceiving spring. "You've been had a very long time ago. You've let someone else put a bit in your mouth and a throttle in your throat. You are a wanton, and you are rotten."

The man who was Cliveden Houseghost was coming up the slope to tell Ranwick that breakfast was ready down in the lodge. Cliveden was clean-shaved and bright eyed, so some space of time had gone by for this man to have been awakened and readied.

"I hadn't even found the spring," Cliveden said. "Crescencia told me that you had found it here. I had been coming up the wrong draw, and the

sound of it is deceptive. There's another draw that comes more water, but it gets it from a long ooze and seep, not from a spring. More than half of this water seems to turn back inside the hill here. It comes out gradually into that other draw, without a spring. And she looks so honest and so innocent."

"But she isn't, Cliveden. It isn't in their nature to be. If I find one that is, I'll look no further."

"Do you test them all, man? Or do you guess? I will test this one sometime today or tomorrow to see what is in her throat. Crescentia says to tell the funny old man that breakfast is ready. I guess that's you."

"Yes," Ranwick said. "I will be down in a very little while."

Cliveden Houseghost went back to his lodge below. He seemed to be a pleasant young man. He even seemed to know about springs. And he probably knew about one pegged Crescentia, and perhaps he had even mastered her. But Ranwick would never know all the springs or all their spirits. He would never know enough about any of them, except that one thing about all of them that he wished he didn't know. They were lovely though, even though they were never conventionally lovely.

Springs, sources, fountains, how they did break out of their green hills! There was Old Carp Springs. That was almost as much a type as Iron Mountain Spring. Really, there were six Old Carp Springs that Ranwick had known, and he would distinguish them by their state or region. And who were the Old Carps who lived in the Old Carp Springs? They dwell, one each to a spring basin, in those pools that were so small about them that they became like houses or skin. How could the carp have come to the various pools, and how could they remain there forever with no contact with their fellows? Inside their carp disguises, just who were they anyhow? Oh, there were a lot of very friendly springs, slushily affectionate springs.

Bright-Wine Spring was one. Fox-Fire Spring in Georgia (Oh, remember the long-legged lady with fox-fire in her eyes who was pegged of that one!), Broken-Dog Spring in Texas, Stump-water Spring in Minnesota, Left-Hand Spring in Oklahoma. In New Mexico there was a very small spring that was named Saint Angelo's Ocean. But the litany of the full ten thousand is required for the whole appreciation of the music of their names.

Crescentia Houseghost came, barefoot through the spring-pool to

Ranwick there. Now she was wearing some sort of skirted thing above her long bare legs.

"Old Ranwick who loves slurpy springs and slurpy spring pegs, love me also," she said, "and come down to breakfast while you love me." She took him up on her and carried him through the spring and away. So they went down to the lodge with only slight dalliance, such as can never be entirely eliminated when dealing with a pegged.

They came to the lodge and had breakfast, and Ranwick Sorgente stayed on with the Houseghosts afterwards.

"Ranwick Sorgente," Cliveden Houseghost said to him that day. "Do you ever come onto old bronze? Very old bronze is what I mean."

"Yes, I often come onto bronze that seems very old to me."

"How old? Have you had training in metals, and in archeo things generally?"

"Yes, I've had training. Oh, I've



come onto good bronze that had to be a quarter of a million years old at least, where it was."

"But bronze is an alloy that does not occur in nature."

"I know, Cliveden, but if one removed all the things that 'do not occur in nature' there wouldn't be much left."

"Do you know what this is that I have here, Sorgente?"

"No, but I have come across it—not in nature, of course, since it is one of the things that 'do not occur in nature', but in certain unnatural enclaves in the middle of nature. It's an older alloy than any of the bronzes, I believe."

"Crescentia tells me that you collect springs, Sorgente, that you have made yourself familiar with more than ten thousand springs. Is there a reason why you have selected springs, out of all phenomena?"

"A love affair only, Cliveden, and I can't account for it. Springs are incomplete. I can complete some of them a little bit. That is what love is, to me.

There's a shameful secret connected with every spring. That totals up to quite a frustration in ten thousand times of it."

"I would like to get that down," Cliveden said. "I believe it's an aspect of a major problem that I'm working on. I wonder if you would, now and then as the days go by, write down some of your impressions about springs in this folder here? I believe that the pertinent parts of your impressions will well up naturally to be recorded here."

"Yes, they'll well out of me like a spring itself," Ranwick said. "I'll do it, I suppose. Or, if it does begin to flow by itself, I'll not impede it."

"I've had other accidental visitors a little like you," Cliveden said. "I seem to collect visitors who fit in with my subject of study. I believe that you are sent to me to clarify a part of my work. Other visitors have recorded impressions in folders that we have here. We will dip into them at our leisure."

"All right," Ranwick said. He liked it here, but he felt a danger. There were sink holes here somewhere where one could break through and fall into caverns for a small or a great distance. Ranwick often came onto such dangerous sink holes when he was tracking streams up to their spring sources.

Ranwick went out with Crescentia Houseghost that afternoon to look for other springs. She was barefooted and bolsterous, a long-legged bay colt of heroic size, a rover and a rock-climber, and it was hard to keep up with her. She went always at a canter, over the up-meadows and glades and rocks, through clumps of saw-grass as if there was no harm in them. She'd go breast deep in the tumbling waters of the brooks, and she would race up slopes. Then she would swoop back on Ranwick with lavish affection and wet smoothness.

Once she pulled him down in the grass with her to lie on her lanky body and her full but somehow angular breasts. She lapped his face with her tongue as if she were a mother cat and he were her kitten. "Oh, you funny tasting man!" she said. "I will roll you in spice-grass, and then I'll eat you." He made love to her arched neck and her throat.

With sparkling surprise once more, they found another spring late in the afternoon.

"It is perfect, it is perfect," Crescentia said, and she went chin-deep into the pool of the spring, letting the gushing water fall heavily into her upturned face.

"It is not perfect," Ranwick said, "and I wouldn't want it perfect. But



there is something wrong about it that I would like to have changed to right, something about every one of them."

"But it's so natural," Crescentia said, "and so exuberant."

"No, it is not natural," Ranwick told her. "That's the awful secret. And its exuberance is contrived. I wonder if yours is, Crescentia?"

"Not my exuberance, something else. You were playing with my throat. Did you hear it ticking there? I don't know what it is or why I have it."

"I wonder where the pegoid of this spring is?"

"Oh Ranwick, can't I be the pegoid of this spring too? I'll not share you with another one here. If she comes, I'll pull her down under the water with me and drown her."

"A pegoid can't drown," Crescentia."

"No, we can't, can we? I'd forgotten that. That's the way I can tell them apart."

They went back to the lodge by a rambling way. They went down by a different valley, crossing and recrossing a skittish stream. They would find the spring-of-origin of this new stream tomorrow. Crescentia who was barefoot carried the shod Ranwick on her back several times when she waded and crossed and recrossed the stream. He loved to ride on her exuberant hips. He made love to her strong arched neck with his encircling arms, and to her rank, yellow, mane-like hair with his face in it.

Oh, she was an heroic colt! But there were many awkwardnesses about her that would lose points at a colt show.

"You think there is something unnatural about the springs," Crescentia said. "Cliveden thinks there is something unnatural about the rock-strata themselves. Do you think that there is something unnatural about me also?"

"Yes, something unnatural about every pegoid, something especially unnatural about you. I wish it weren't so with the springs and their pegoids, and with you."

"Oh, I think we will stay just as we are," she said.

They came to the lodge just at dark. It was peaceful there, even though it was a bristling and animalistic sort of peace. There was high and pleasant interest in the lodge with the House-ghost couple. They dined and drank; they talked and read and examined specimens and artifacts.

"I set pieces in, and I set other pieces in," Cliveden Houseghost said, "and none of them explains the very large piece that is in excess. You and your springs, Ranwick, are a very wel-

come piece. Crescentia here is puzzled that you find springs unnatural. She has always been puzzled that I find so large a portion of the world to be unnatural."

"Is she puzzled that you find her unnatural, Cliveden?" Ranwick asked.

"Yes, I am puzzled," Crescentia told both of them. "Oh, but I am natural. I have no tricks at all in me except a few natural ones. And you have told me what I am, Ranwick, a pegoid. I never knew the name before. Tell us the names of some of the other ten thousand springs."

"Oh, there's Frenchman Spring, Miser's Gold Spring, White-Tail Spring, Joe Creek Spring, Sore Foot Spring, Pot Luck Spring, Wilson's Ditch Spring, Whistling Kettle Spring, Chicken Thief Spring, Run Rabbit Spring, Ornerly Cow Spring, Bidding Tongue Spring, Pray-Me-Flow Spring."

"Why is it named that?" Crescentia asked.

"As a pegoid, you know that it's forbidden to ask the meaning of a spring's name. But Pray-Me-Flow, well, it's above a poor town in a frugal country, and it has no water to waste. It will stand dry until the women come to it with buckets and jugs. Then the women pray for water, and the spring gushes until it has filled all their containers. Then it will gush no more till someone else prays for water."

"Oh, that's a miracle then," Crescentia said.

"No. It's not quite the same as the miracles at Three Miracle Spring, for instance. Pray-Me-Flow really does find her water hard to come by. But every spring is a miracle. It is the miracle of striking a rock with an Aaron's rod and having the water gush out. Aaron's Rod Spring, by the way, is in Alabama. The miracle is no less pleasant and no less stunning when it is repeated ten thousand times. But every miracle has deep underground roots. It isn't all darkness underground, not on the insides of the hills and earths and mountains. The underground water brings its own sort of light to the open air sunshine. There's an explosive sparkle to the water breaking from underground to the light. The water will never again be so bright as when it first gushes from underground. It would be perfect, it would be perfect if only, if only there weren't, aw no—" Ranwick strode about as if having difficulty with what he wanted to say.

"Something sticks in your throat, Ranwick," Crescentia said. "What?"

"The fact that every spring has a contrived throat; yes, a shockingly artificial and contrived throat."

"Come play with my throat," Cres-

centia said.

"Here is the folder of notes that our last special guest before you jotted down," Cliveden said. "Read them at whatever pace you will. I hope you will find them interesting. In fact, it is imperative that you find them interesting. We are forming up an interlinked pattern in this, Ranwick, and you are one of the links. Our last guest was an Englishman, Nigel Graystone. You will notice that he titles his notes 'Rock Gardens of the Mesozoic'. I don't believe that he meant the title for a humorous tag at all. It's an apt description of the contents which are very detailed. One could almost, by following the directional hints given in these notes, build and detail a world of one's own. All that would be needed is adequate material (and there are hints on how that material might be acquired), and a place to set it down (and there are other hints as to how that place might be arranged for). You requisition these stones. You follow these patterns. And you make a world. And it will be a codified world: that's a requirement."

Ranwick took the folder with the Nigel Graystone notes.

"Where is Graystone now?" he asked.

"Dead," Cliveden said. "He drowned about a year ago."

"Would you like to make a world, Crescentia?" Ranwick asked her, "a world after the heart's desire and such?"

"Oh, I thought that I had made this one," she laughed. "It's quite a bit after my heart's desire. I like it. It's almost loose enough. It's almost natural enough also, though you two say that it isn't."

Ranwick would read scraps of the Graystone notes, and then he would stride about. Crescentia sat stretched out like the big grinning water-cat that she was. Cliveden was doing things with shavings of metal and drops of regents, and examining his results under a microscope. Crescentia pulled Ranwick onto her long-leggy lap, and he now loved her like the ten thousand and first spring.

"This Nigel Graystone knows about rocks," Ranwick said then. "Last month I asked a seaman what he knew about rocks. I am on ship often: I do not find all ten thousand springs in one country. I know pretty much about rocks," the seaman said. "They're mostly made out of salt. There are different kinds of salt in the world, and that makes the rocks look different. A rock is just like a wave, only very much slower. Remember that, and you won't

go very far wrong on rocks or waves either one.' That's what the seaman told me, and I think he was right. And this Nigel in the notes, he goes on and on about patterns in the rocks. He seems to see more patterns than there are."

"Oh probably not," Cliveden Houseghost said. "If the pattern isn't there, you'll know it. Stay away from the places that don't have the imposed pattern: stay away from the perfectly natural places. You'd be extinguished there. I believe that there are several such natural places on the Earth yet, untampered-with places, unpatterned places. Stay away from them, Ranwick. They are insane and inane (*Inanis et vacuus*, 'God called them in his original Latin), and they'll turn you insane if you linger with them any time at all."

"I don't want a pattern imposed too blatantly," Ranwick said. "I don't want it imposed on nature. I am looking forever for that unspooled nature."

"You are confused, Ranwick," Cliveden Houseghost said. "To impose a pattern is not to spoil. It is to unspoil. Everything is waste and worthless and weird in the beginning. It is uneven, and it is spoiled, stripped of everything. It will do you to death and not know it, for primordial things have no mind. But the very word is tricky, as though the world might have been spoiled and stripped in time. No, it wasn't; it was before time. It wasn't a thing done; it was the original case. The underlying emptiness is too spoiled to be comprehended by any of the senses. The chaos is under everything, and it cannot be lived in; it cannot even be died in comfortably. It is spoiled and it is rotten in the first state, and I hope that will not also be the last state. Do you understand what had to be done? The world had to be unvoided; the chaos had to be unchaosed; the spoil had to be unspooled; and it must be continued. Everything has to be patterned and structured, continuously. That is the real beginning: the patterning. But in some cases, all the patterning possible still isn't enough. In one case very near to me it isn't."

Crescentia had gone to sleep, and Ranwick rose from her lanky thighs.

"I don't think so, Cliveden," Ranwick said. "There had to be a simple nature first."

"No, there did not. The simple did not come first. The murderous confusion and complexity came first. And then came the simplifying, the ordering, the patterning, the abstracting, the unspooling. The seaman you talked to told you a little about waves. Let me tell you about them also. Waves have

a history, the most fluid history ever and the most incredibly indexed. The 'Wet Process Transparency Recorder' of waves beats any dry process microfilming there is, and it's all life-sized.

"Waves," as the seaman told you, are just like rocks only faster. Ten minutes of waves is equivalent to a million years of rocks, so waves may be used as a speed-up tool. There are developments and maturities in waves that have not yet appeared in rocks, so they may also be used as a prediction tool. With both, we have the spectacle of great and Cyclopean constructions, of bridges and roads and battlements, of walls and revetments, and most spectacularly of topless and toppling towers, building and collapsing underground or underwater. All geology is concerned with these towers growing underground. They go up and up, and one of them out of a thousand will even raise its head through the earth surface itself, but most collapse while still underground. They will have built themselves very high, and when they topple they will do so with a breathtakingly speedy fall. They may plummet as much as an inch a century. These primordial towers and their falling worked towards confusion. They broke patterns. They raised clouds of underground dust.

"It was to unconfuse the rubble towers and to slow their toppling that reinforcements, most of them horizontal, were driven among this world-forest of steeples, of pillars, of columns, of towers indeed. The reinforcements tied the tower-trees together and induced regularity in rocks, and in waves. That is what Nigel in the notes writes about. These reinforcements are in the water as well as in the earth. Water towers build and collapse within short seconds, so it is necessary to structure them to avoid a return to total chaos. There are balks, beams, wedges, struts, rafters, joists and studs being erected constantly out of the more responsible salt and the more ordered water. These watery reinforcements are real, and they may be seen in a certain light. Were this not the case, then all the water in the world would be chaotic water. But with a deliberate process of ordering and unspooling, every successive tower, though it may live for but one to thirty seconds, lives in a tradition of orderly growth and collapse. Crescentia, great child, rise and go to bed."

Crescentia rose, apparently without awakening, and went off to bed, like a zombie.

"There's some disturbing passages in the notes, yes," Ranwick said. "I read: 'There is a second stabilization

or unspooling very late, right in the middle of the mesozoic. It is disguised as a series of massive vulcanisms, but they were no more than disguises. It was a contrived, intrusive, artificial concretions of most strategic economy, and it was massive in effect. We still live on that deposit of stability and patterning of that too-orderly mesozoic intrusion.' That's what your visitor wrote, Cliveden. If that passage means what it says, then the whole world will have to be reclassified, will it not?"

"The world will have to be classified as almost entirely artificial at a late date, yes," Cliveden said. Then he seemed to change the subject a little bit as he went on:

"You have heard about megalithic constructions in Peru, in Mexico, in Anatolia, in India, in Ankor, on Malta, all over the world, Ranwick," he said. "These big, man-heaped constructs have been called Cyclopean, and they do have a sort of half-blind, one-eyed, monocular aspect to them. There is one observation always associated with their descriptions; that their stones are fitted and sealed so accurately that not even a knife-blade can be inserted between the stones. This seems the more amazing since the stones are highly irregular in shape in their many-tormented bulk, and they are sometimes set into massive walls four or five of them thick, and they fit interiorly and exteriorly, each stone touching and surfacing perfectly with six to nine other stones. And they are of such a weight that not many fitting trials could be made, of such weight indeed that it is unknown how they were set into place even once.

"This thing is not possible even in miniature, Ranwick. The shrewdest sculptor, working in softer material, cannot do it. A machinist cannot do it with all his gauges, and a pattern-maker cannot do it. Nobody can get more than three irregular pieces to fit even approximately. No, there is no way that it could be done with mega-stones; no way except one."

"And what way is that, Cliveden?"

"Oh, the stones have to be manufactured in place. They have to be very soft and malleable, almost liquid, when they are fitted so closely. They fit as water fits its bucket because they are poured like water."

"You are saying that some of the huge stones were a sort of poured concrete and not stones at all?" Ranwick asked.

"Nigel Graystone was writing that and much more, Ranwick. He was writing that a significant part of the world as we know it was so poured artificially. His 'Rock-Gardens of the Mesozoic' were our world, very much

(Continued on page 58)



A DAISYCHAIN FOR PAV

by Kathleen Sky

"Mommy, mommy, make it stop! They're hurting Pav; please mommy—make it stop—**MOMMY!**"

"Pav, where are you? Don't hide from me, Pav; this isn't a game—I can't find you."

"It hurts, make it stop—they hurt Pav—mommy!"

"Do I go left or right? Where are you? It's dark under the trees. There, I see you, blood dripping, flesh old—dead, dead Pav! The ropes are too tight, lights in my eyes, can't move, pain. Someone is screaming—who? Pav is dead, Pav, I can't, can't get to you can't save you can't bring you back—PAV!"

"Mommy, help me, it hurts. Where are you, mommy?"

"P-A-A-A-A-V..."

"Why do you keep coming back, Pav? Why do you give me nightmares in the day—no sleep at night? Why did you die why didn't I die why did they kill you and I'm still alive and you dead and me not alive and you not dead, I loved you, Pav—I did love you..."

I can hear bells—warning system bells. Run down the tubes and tunnels, Karushila, run down and lock the hatches, lock them, keep them out, Karushila...

No.

It would be just what they would expect of me, and they can open the hatches from the outside—hear them banging, Karushila? Hear the iron-

covered list of their ship banging at your mind?

I hear them.

Don't go meet them, make them come to you, make them search the station until they find your secret chamber, make them find your cocoon, end you the worm dreaming in a nest of silk...

I have nightmares.

Only because you think too much.

Pav brings me nightmares.

Don't think of Pav.

I must. Dead baby, rotting skin, missing eyes, face...

Think about Milton hunting for you; fat old Milton digging through mountains of your shit for the gold he thinks is there.

Ah, I am the captive princess who can spin shit into gold. The captive princess/broodhen in the weather station...

Castle? Weather/castle station? Call it a castle.

Milton must come and find me.

Hunting in the closets, huffing, puffing, fat old Milton trying to drag his baggy body up a rope of my hair, or fighting a dragon, killing an ogre, tricking a witch, solving a riddle, all for me!

Hunt in the closets of my mind, Sir Milton. Clank through it clad in your rusty old armor—rusty armor to match your rusty-dusty mind...

Pav loved games. We played hide

and seek, jacks, king of the hill—Pav was king of the hill and I was the dirty rascal—I am the dirty rascal I am the dirty rascal I am.

Pav!

No.

That was a long time ago, several lifetimes ago, several turns of the wheel ago. Pav is dead—no more games.

Dr. Milton says so. I must forget Pav, I must get well, I must grow strong, I must forget Pav.

Ah, but he said, "DO NOT FORGET THE FORMULA!"

What formula?

It's most important. Forget Pav, he's not important, he means nothing to Milton, so try to forget...

REMEMBER THE FORMULA!

I remember only Pav.

You're naughty.

Because I remember the wrong things?

Here he comes—clank ca-clank—too quickly; he must have used the scanners.

CHEATER!

You peeked, cheaters cheaters cheat-cheat, you peeked, damn you.

Two of them? There is Dr. Milton and...

THONE THONE THONE THONE THONE THONE THONE THONE THONE THONE

"Ah, hello there, good morning my dear! How are you today? You remember Captain Berli-thone, don't

you, Dr. Malvarti?"

"Greetings, Karushile. My Thone! Of course she remembers me. No, he's not mine; they gave him to me and—we worked together.—They took him away. Can't you say good morning to me?" I was good, really I was . . .

"Yes, but you did take me a bit by surprise. Use the official voice, Karushile! I wasn't expecting anyone but Dr. Milton or a tech crewman. How does my voice do that? But it is nice to see you again." If it works so well, why doesn't my head?

"Dear, I brought the Captain here because the Confederation, and the Center, would like to see Project STORK started up again. You see, our findings were not as conclusive as we had thought; certain anomalies have crept into the fecal analyses—Oh Ho!—and we are left with some loose ends—Yes, Doctor! Just call me Brad. I know about those loose ends—and we were hoping you could clear them up for us." Project Aranon, Project STORK, Project FORMULA.

"Pav's medical records showed that something happened to him on Aranon—Yes, he was killed!—and we would like some sort of explanation for this. There was no such change in your records—Or in my shit—so we would like you to leave the station so this can be more thoroughly investigated."

"I like working in the station."

"But Karushile . . ."

"I LIKE WORKING IN THE STATION!"

"There, there, no need to yell, dear—she gets excited sometimes, you understand . . ."

"But how does she feel about continuing STORK? ComFleet wants work started as soon as possible."

I don't want to play that game. I used to play with test tubes; oh, I had lots of them, lots and lots and lots. Pav played too, but not so well—he was just a little boy. I gave him some tests—he was my little boy, you see.

"Do you want me to make another Pav?"

"Pav is dead, Karushile."

"I'm sorry, dear, there isn't anything we can do to change that, but with the same gene pool to work with the results should be fairly gratifying."

To whom. "Just call me Brad," to whom gratifying?

"But I'm ill. The experiment being what it is, don't you think it would be better to wait until my health im-

proves?"

"Physically you are in fine shape, we should have no worries over that."

"But I'm quite mad (Careful, carefully) so they say."

"Doctor Malvarti?"

"Karushile, don't. ComFleet was told you'd only had a nervous breakdown. It is nothing to worry about, you'll be over it quite soon I am sure—Dr. Milton, hadn't you better be a bit more careful about what your tech crew is saying in front of her?"

"Yes, I'll get right on it. We can't have her upset like this, it's not good for the Project."

AH HA, you take care; it's because you think I'm not here that you say "her, her" as if I couldn't understand you. I'm mad, and you know it, but you keep on hoping I'm not too insane; I might remember something—FORMULA?—ARANONI! I REMEMBER.

"My dear, we felt it might help your case if you had another child, so Captain Berli-thone was sent here to continue Project STORK with you. Now, wouldn't you like to get back to work? Another child, girl or boy, could be good for you."

"I had a child, a boy named Pav. Did you know he looked like you, Thone?" Here it is, out in the open at last—make a baby for ComFleet and the Center, Karushile, that's a GOOD girl.

"But Pav is dead, my dear, remember?"

"Yes—they killed him. Aranon murdered my baby." No, don't say that. Thone looks sick, mustn't upset Thone.

"I know how you feel; he was my son too, Karushile."

"No, you can't know." They gave him to me and said I should; for the good of the child, they said, I should bring him up . . .

"I could not take care of him. My position with ComFleet . . ."

"The Center felt it unwise to bring him up in an artificial environment . . ."

"We only wanted what was best . . ."

"The Center felt . . ."

"Did you ever see him, Dr. Milton? He was beautiful—brown-skinned like Thone, with the Rigelien pigment lights just like his. Pav looked like he had stars all over his body."

"Karushile, please."

"He had your eyes—the slit pupils, but colored like mine, such a lovely blue. People used to remark on how odd it looked, cat-shaped blue eyes with such dark skin, but I loved it, he

was beautiful." Pav, I loved you—believe that, even though you were different. Honest, Pav, I loved you . . .

"Dear, it's been three years since Pav died. Shouldn't you be trying to forget . . ."

"I will never forget Aranon, NEVER, NEVER! Calm, try for calm."

"Karushile, it is over; the murderers were caught and punished for their crime. Please try to forget it, you will get well faster that way."

"Punished? I wonder how many of them were really caught. They would all tell different stories, and it would only be my reports against the word of four hundred colonists—all those people, and one mad woman." Who's gonna believe me? Step right up, folks, believe the mad woman, believe and you're gonna live forever. No, I didn't say that. I said "no" and they killed Pav.

"They cut off my baby's fingers one by one, then they started on his arms and legs; did you know that, Thone? That's why I remember Aranon so well—little brown fingers, little brown toes . . ."

"Don't, you're only making it that much more difficult—Milton, I thought you told me she was much better these days."

"Well, she goes along quite well for a while, then has a bad spell—generally only lasts a day or so. We do have some fairly effective methods for dealing with her case, but we are by no means perfect."

"I'm going to get well soon, 'Brad' says so. You want 'Her' well so she can play with test tubes again; no one cares if 'I' get well. 'I' don't want to get well, Thone. Don't make me, please?"

"She seems worse than we were informed. ComFleet will not be happy with you, Milton."

"You must understand, we are doing everything in our power to help her. The Center is fairly sure if Dr. Malvarti has another child it should help her to get over her block, return to her job. And naturally there are several other projects we wish to help her with . . ."

"I don't want another child." I only want Pav.

"My dear . . ."

"Karushile, it's for your own good . . ."

"Captain, why don't you try to reason with her? I'll go check out our scanners and see that everything is working as programmed."

"It has been such a long time since I last saw you, Thone. I wrote to you several times from Aranon, but you

never answered. After—after Pav was killed I couldn't write, but they said you knew, why didn't you come to see me?"

"I couldn't, you know that. ComFleet had need of my services, and—you have gotten far more emotional over this than you should have. Dr. Milton was quite upset over it. He asked me not to write, or try to see you again."

"I know, he told me." I was good, but they took you away. I did what they asked—I was GOOD. I was so good.

"Dr. Milton and I, of course, are quite concerned about you..."

"Do you love me, Thone?"

"Karushla! I was only to impregnate you, nothing more. I am sorry you did get more involved than I, but I do not feel responsible for your emotional state. It was my wish that the Project be done by artificial means, but I was outvoted."

"They wanted to make sure nothing would go wrong, so it had to be done 'naturally,' they said."

"And I agreed to it..."

"If you had said you loved me, I would have continued Project STORK; even if you didn't mean it, I still would have liked to hear you say it."

"It would be unwise of me to lie to you. It would not help you to get well."

"Yes, I must get well. There are enough Terran women in the Fleet, why don't you go get one of them for STORK and just leave me alone?"

"The experiment was successful only with you. Pav proved to be much more than either the Center or ComFleet had hoped for..."

"Very—but he is dead, and we feel the Project should..."

"They killed my baby. I have a right to be insane if I wish. They cut him up in little pieces, bit by bit, just to get me to tell them what they wanted. I heard him scream, over and over and over, over, over—Pav, oh Pav..."

"Stop it! Stop torturing yourself. You are killing all that is worthwhile in you

by this returning to his death, day after day. You are more important than the life of a six year old boy."

"Important to whom? To you, Thone, to Milton? Or is it what I might know that is important and not me?"

"You see, you are unsettling yourself again."

"YOU WEREN'T THERE! You don't know what it was like; you can't know, and I pray by whatever Gods there are that you never learn."

"You are not the only one to suffer—Dr. Rimney killed himself over his part in the affair."

"Shove Doctor Rimney!"

"Oh, what will you give me?" say the sad bells of Rimney. Rimney, was it your hide you were trying to save, or were you drunk that night—loose-lipped, clanging Rimney—YOU FOOL!

"He only did what he thought was right."

"And I was wrong—it was all my fault. I couldn't save Pav. didn't do my job right—I was a rotten planetary ecologist, I couldn't do anything for those people."

"You might have done a bit less than you could have, but no one could have predicted the duster bags in the hybrid wheat, and the sleam raid was just bad luck."

"An ecologist is a god to his colonists. It was my responsibility to provide rain in due season, grow rich harvests and make the cattle fruitful. I was a lousy Goddess."

Sacrifice to the gods for rain, sacrifice for fruitful wombs—and if the Goddess is naughty, sacrifice her son to her. "Yes, my fault, I was bad..."

"You are talking nonsense. Your biological reports were of great value to the Confederation. Aranon can now be settled."

"Will they harm Aranon, or just do research now?"

"A bit of both, I think."

Go ahead, look all you want. You'll not find anything that's going to tell you

what you want to know.

"Ananon was such a beautiful planet. I remember the first time I saw it—Pave and I..."

I suppose they will form a new agricultural colony somewhere. Aranon will feed a lot of people, what with our new methods of killing off the duster bugs and stopping the sleam from breeding."

"Who's going to stop the colonists from breeding more little devils like themselves?"

"All the people in the original group have been interrogated concerning their part in the killing, and then split up so there would be no chance of the gestalt forming again. You must understand that they were afraid, that's why they did it."

"I was afraid, too. Pav was scared for only a little while—then he was dead and couldn't be afraid anymore."

"My poor Karushla, it must have been hell for you."

"No, the hell comes now, remembering those men over and over, over. The nightmares are bad..."

"You had a hard winter on Aranon, short of food. The crash of the emergency supply ship didn't help, either—so when the people heard Rimney say that you had perfected a method of immortality, they panicked. They must have thought you could help them but would not—something about you being annoyed by the fact that they would not let their children play with Pav."

"They didn't like Pav—or me either, for that matter. But I couldn't help them—there is no such thing as immortality, do you understand? Immortality for bugs like them. Live forever and kill more babies. Longer life, but no change in those beasts' minds." I could do nothing for them. Nothing."

"ComFleet thinks if anyone might have found it, you would be the one."

"It was only an experiment, not perfect. I didn't know what it would do.

Rimney lied, I think, but I can't remember very well."

"You have got to get well, Kerushila . . ."

"It wouldn't have worked anyway. They would still have had to eat; cells need food, immortality can't feed blood cells. They thought it might be 'Take a pill, never get ill, take a pill, never get ill, take a pill . . .'

"STOP THAT!"
"You needn't shout, Thone, there is no reason to . . ."

"Did you ever think if you had a form of immortality, even a limited form, you too are guilty of Pav's death? You should have told the colonists what they wanted to know, it would have been simpler. Why didn't you like to them, give them something they might believe was an immortality drug?"

"I was too frightened to think clearly. They had me tied up, I had to watch—listen to him scream—PAVI!"

I was scared, too, afraid of what they might do to me when they found the process only worked on Pav. Pav, I loved you, believe me, Pav—I didn't think they would kill you. I WAS AFRAID!

"You will be all right now. Rimney told us you were out of your head for days—shock, he said. Rimney saved your life—they would have killed you, too, just to cover up what happened that night. I am surprised they did not kill both of you at once."

"They still hoped he might tell them what I could not. He knew nothing about living, forever or otherwise."

"Rimney," clanking Rimney, save my life and your hide, too. Call ComFleet, but not too soon—the boy is still alive, she'll tell, soon, soon. She loves him. He was picking over Pav's bones when ComFleet came, the fool was sucking on Pav's bones—and they call me mad."

"Well and how are we doing? Everything in the station is shipshape. I hope you could make some progress with her, Captain; the Project must go on,

you know."

Oh, are you back, "Just call me Bred"? Guess you were watching and found out it wasn't doing any good to let Thone talk to me. Are you ready to put your tin-plated hands back into my brain?"

"Karushila and I have had a nice long talk, Milton . . ."

"I'm sorry, Dr. Milton, I do not want a child at this point; I'm not well enough for anything that strenuous."

"But we've already been through that."

"I will not have a baby now; I don't want to, and you can't make me."

"No one wants to make you do anything, Karushila; we simply felt it would be best for you . . ."

"Maybe some lab work would help. She has fully equipped facilities here at the station . . ."

Got you, "Brad"—lab work—baby—remember, you can't fool me. You want more than you'll give, just like all the other bugs."

"Perhaps we should let her alone about this project."

STORK is not as important as her health. You have got to get well; I'm really quite disappointed in the progress shown so far in your case."

Gotcha, too; thought you might suggest something interesting—like rape as a means of getting me with child."

"The Center has done the best it can . . ."

"Which is not good enough. I'm not sure I care for the idea of putting Kerushila on a station all by herself. What if something should happen to her?"

"It only takes twenty minutes to get here from ground control."

"People die in far less than twenty seconds."

"I like it here—I wanted to come." I like being alone . . .

"I think she should be removed to the ComFleet facilities . . ."

"We at the Center . . ."

"I LUKE IT HERE!"

"Deer, you're shouting; that's not g-o-o-d for you."

"Is there any chance she is taking her illness?"

"Oh, I know all about handssaws and hawks, calling the north wind by another name . . . Meria, blow my son to me, I need my Pav beside me . . ."

"Not by any means. She couldn't keep it up for three years—we've been observing her very closely."

"I don't want to be sane."

"My dear!"
"Kerushila!"

"I can't remember anything about any Project; I don't want to. I only remember Arenon, and making daisychains with Pav."

"Daisychains!"

"My dear, it would be better if you forgot all about Arenon—we've talked about that several times."

"Do you want to know how to make Pav's daisychains?"

"ComFleet is not interested in flowers . . ."

"The Center wants you to get well . . ."

"Daisies?" Smile for them, Kerushila, and say goodbye very sweetly. Then go watch the clouds and remember whatever you wish."

"She must get well."

"A daisy for Pav, a daisy for me . . ."

"She must remember the formula."

"Pull the daisies apart, end put them back together . . ."

"ComFleet will be . . ."

"The Center . . ."

"Put a petal on Pav's, two petals off mine—watch out for the carinoma-colored petals in the Daisychain."

"KARUSHILA, STOP THAT!"

"My dear, calm . . ."

"A daisy for me, a daisy for Pav—Dens, Dn-ah, DNA . . . DAISY? Pull a petal, change a link, make a chain for Pav and me—I will remember."

I am glad I'm not immortal. ★



THE MAGIC GOES AWAY

by Larry Niven

The waves washed him ashore aboard a section of the wooden roof from an Atlantean winery. He was half dead, and mad. There was a corpse on the makeshift raft with him, a centaur girl, three days dead of no obvious cause.

The fisherfolk were awed. They knew the workmanship of the winery roof, and they knew that the stranger must

have survived the greatest disaster in human history. Perhaps they considered him a good luck charm.

He was lucky. The fisherfolk did not steal the golden arm bands he wore. They fed him by hand until he could feed himself. When he grew strong they put him to work. He could not or would not speak, but he could follow orders. He was a big man. When his weight

came back he could lift as much as any two fishermen.

By day he worked like a golem, tirelessly; they had to remember to tell him when to stop. By night he would pull his broken sword from its scabbard—the blade was broken to within two thumbs of the hilt—and turn it in his hands as if studying it.

He slayed in the bachelors' longhouse. Women who approached him found him unresponsive. They attributed it to his sickness.

Four months after his arrival he spoke his first words.

The boy Hatchap was moving down the line of sleeping bachelors, waking them for the day's fishing. He found the stranger staring at the ceiling in grief and anguish. "Like magic. Magic," he mumbled. Then a smile broke over the stranger's face, for the first time Hatchap could remember. "Magician."



he said.

That night, after the boats were in, he went to the oldest man in the village and said, "I have to talk to a magician."

The old man was petient. He explained that a witch lived in the nearest village, but that this Mirandee had departed months ago. By now she would be meeting colleagues in Pristhil. There would be no competent magician nearer than Pristhil, which was many days' journey away.

Mad Orolandes nodded as if he understood.

He was gone the next morning. He had left one of his bracelets.

The Warlock

Pristhil and the village called Warlock's Cave were six hundred miles apart. Once the Warlock would have flown that distance in a single night. It disgusted him to be leaving Warlock's

Cave on unicornback, leading pack unicorns.

But he and Clubfoot considered this prudent. They might have taken riding dragons, intelligent allies... and in one or another region where too much magic had leached mana from the earth, they would have left the bones of their mounts to blend with the rocks. Dragon metabolism was partly magical.

It was well that they did this. The mana-rich places they expected to cross by magic were not there. Three of their unicorns died in the desert when Clubfoot ran out of the ability to make ren.

The situation was just this desperate. Clubfoot and the Warlock, two of the most powerful magicians left in the world, came to Pristhil on foot, leading a peck unicorn.

Clubfoot was an American, black of hair and red of skin. His ancestors had fled an Asian infestation of vampires, had crossed the sea by magic in the company of a tribe of the wolf people. He limped because of a handicap he might have cured decades ago, except that it would have robbed him of half his power.

And the Warlock limped because of his age.

Limping, they came to the crest of a hill overlooking Pristhil.

It was late afternoon. Already the tremendous shadow of Mount Velhalla, last home of a quarrelsome pantheon of gods now gone mythical, sprawled eastward across Pristhil. The village had grown since the Warlock had last seen it, one hundred and ten years ago.

"Pristhil was founded on magic," the Warlock said half to himself.

Clubfoot heard. "Was it?"

The Warlock pointed to a dish-shaped depression north of the city well. "That crater is old, but you can still see the shape of it, can't you? That's Fistfall. This village was once nothing more than a trading center for talismans: fragments of the Fist, a boulder of starstone that fell eons ago. The merchants ran out of starstone long ago, but the village keeps growing. How?"

"They must be trading something else."

"Look, Clubfoot, there are guards under Lion! Lion used to be all the guard Pristhil needed."

"The big stone statue?"

The Warlock looked at him oddly. "Yes, the stone statue. Lion must be dead by now."

The guards hailed them as they came within shouting distance. "Ho, travelers! What would you in Pristhil?"

Clubfoot cried, "We intend Pristhil's salvation, and the world's!"

"Oh, magicians! Well, you're welcome." The head guard grinned. He was a burly, earthy man in armor denoted by war. "Though I don't trust your salvation. What have you come to do for us? Make more starstone?"

Clubfoot turned huffy. "It was for no trivial purpose that we traveled six hundred miles."

"Your pardon, but my grandfather used to fly half around the world to attend a banquet," said the head guard. "Poor old man. None of his spells worked, there at the end. He kept going over and over the same rejuvenation spell until he died. Wanted me to train for magic too. I had more sense."

A grating voice said, "Weerri... lock."

The blood drained from the head guard's face. Slowly he turned. Other guards were backing away.

The stone statue looked down at the magicians. Its rough-carved stone face was a blend of human and hyena. "I know you," said the rusty, almost subsonic voice. "Waarloek."

"Lion!" the Warlock cried joyfully. "I thought you must be dead!"

"Almost. I sleep for years, for tens of years. Sometimes I wake for a few hours. The life goes out of me," said the statue. "I wish it were not so. How can I do my duty? One day an enemy will slip past me, into the city."

"We'll see if we can do something about that."

"I wish you luck."

Clubfoot spoke confidently. "The best brains in the world are gathered here. How can we fail?"

"You're young," said Lion.

They passed on.

Orolandes II

It was luck for Orolandes that Prisstihl was no further. Else he would have died on the way. He simply made for a place he knew only by name, stopping sometimes to ask directions, or to ask for work and food. He was gaunt again before he reached Prisstihl.

Priststihl was large for a village, but hardly a city. The big man with the broken sword skirted a dish-shaped barren depression. There was a great stone statue before the city gate, and guards on duty beneath it. One approached him.

"We have little need for swordsmen here," he said.

"I want to talk to a magician," said Orolandes.

"You're in luck," said the guard, and he looked over his shoulder, quickly, nervously, then turned back fast, as if hoping the swordsman wouldn't notice. "Two magicians came today. But what if they don't want to talk to you?"

"I have to talk to a magician," Orolandes said stubbornly. His hand hung near his sword hilt.

The guard forebore to push the matter. The stranger was no pauper; that gold arm band was a form of money. And he was big, and scarred, and armed. "If you're rude to a magician, you'll get what you deserve. Go on in."

Orolandes found a merchant who would change his arm band for coins. The merchant was uneasy in his presence. Orolandes was no longer an obvious madman, perhaps, but the ghost of some recent horror was plain in his face.

The Warlock II

The inn the Warlock loved best was gone, replaced by a stable.

They went searching for another. Citizens of Prisstihl seemed friendly and eager to direct them. Twice the Warlock was recognized by the famous demon trap, the many-colored design tattooed on his bare back.

They found an inn. Thankfully they saw to their remaining unicorn, then moved baggage to their rooms. The Warlock began digging in a saddlebag.

Clubfoot said, "Never mind that. Let's get dinner."

"Shortly." The Warlock had removed most of their spare clothing. Clubfoot sighed and began hanging it, while the Warlock pulled out a wooden box and set it on the table.

Inside, within soft fox skins, was a human skull. The Warlock set it down carefully. One hinge of its jaw was broken, and there were tooth marks on the cheekbones and around both earholes. Otherwise it was intact.

"I still think we should have contrived to lose that," said Clubfoot.

"I disagree. Now let's get dinner."

The inn was crowded. The dining hall was long wooden tables, too close together, with wooden benches down both sides. The magicians fitted themselves into space on one of the benches. Citizens to either side gradually realized who and what they were and gave them plenty of room.

And Clubfoot continued his arguments.

"Look at this logically. You've earned Wavyhill's skull six hundred miles, when we had to throw away baggage we needed more. It's just a skull. It's not even in good condition. But if you work your spells exactly right, and if there's enough residual mana around here, you just might be able to bring Wavyhill back to life so he can kill you!"

"Even if I revive it, it's still just a skull. You'll be all right if you don't stick your fingers in its mouth."

"He's got every reason to want you dead! And me too, because I'm the one who led you to Shiskabil and Hathzoni. Without that you'd never have tracked him down."

"He may not have known that."

"I'd rather he did. Hellspawn! He's branded my memory. I'll never forget Shiskabil. Dead empty, and dried blood everywhere, as if it had rained blood. We may never know how many villages he gutted that way."

"I'm going to revive him tonight. Want to help?"

Clubfoot gnawed at the rich dark meat on an antelope's thighbone. Presently he said, "Would I let you try it alone?"

The Warlock smiled. Clubfoot was near fifty; he thought of himself as experienced in magic. At five times his age the Warlock might have laughed at Clubfoot's solitude. But the Warlock wasn't stupid. He knew that most of his dangerously won knowledge was obsolete.

The mana had been richer, magic had been both easier and more dangerous, when the Warlock was rais-

ing his floating castles. Clubfoot was probably more in tune with the real world. That advantage had been Wavyhill's too. Wavyhill had nearly killed the Warlock; he had not lost that battle through lesser skill.

So the Warlock only smiled and began moving his fingers in an intricate pattern.

Once there had been a young magician, barely past his brilliant apprenticeship, who forbade the waging of war throughout the entire Fertile Crescent. The youth was proud and powerful. His edict held, because he consistently hired himself out to battle the nation he considered the aggressor. In his pride he nicknamed himself Warlock. Had he known that his nickname would become a generic term for magicians, he would not have been at all



surprised.

Then, gradually, the magic went away...

Primary colors streamed up from between the Warlock's fingers, roiled and expanded beneath the beamed roof. Heads turned at the other tables. The clattering of table knives stopped. Then came sounds of delight and appreciative finger-snapping, for a spell the Warlock had last used to blind an enemy army.

Now a lean, scarred swordsman watched the Warlock with haunted eyes. The Warlock did not notice. As he left the dining hall he took with him a bunch of big purple grapes.

Wavyhill's Skull

The necromancer nicknamed Wavyhill—as all magicians carried nicknames, being wary of having their

true names used against them—had based a slave industry on the zombies of murder victims. He had also used magic to make himself unkillable. For these past twenty years he must have been regretting that terribly.

Wavyhill's skull set grinning on the table. Clubfoot regarded it uneasily. "It may be we've had too much wine to try this sort of thing."

"Would you rather try this tomorrow, before dawn, with hangovers? Because I intend to have Wavyhill with me when we meet Mirandee and Piranther."

"All right, go ahead." Clubfoot bolted the door, then worked spells against magical intrusion. Reviving a murderous dead man was chancy enough without risk of someone fouling it up—and there were amateur magicians everywhere in Prsstihl. Magic was an

jaw hinges.

He looked at Clubfoot, who had been watching intently. Clubfoot said, "Eyes?"

"Maybe later." The Warlock said in the old language. "Krantkorpoo, speak to me."

The skull opened its jaws wide and screamed.

Clubfoot and the Warlock covered their ears. It didn't help. The skull's voice was not troubling the air, and it did not reach the ears. At least it would not bother the other guests.

"He's insane! Shut him off!" Clubfoot cried.

"Not yet!"

The skull screamed its agony. Minutes passed before it peused as if drawing breath. Into the pause the Warlock shouted, "Stop that, you idiot! It's over! It's been over for twenty years!"

The skull gaped. It said, "Twenty years?"

"It took me almost that long to find your true name, Krantkorpoo."

"Call me Wavyhill. Who are you? I can't see."

"Just a minute." The Warlock plucked two of what was left of the grapes. He picked up the skull and inserted them into the eye sockets from inside. He inked in two black dots where they showed through the sockets.

"Ah," said the skull. The black dots moved, focussed. They studied Clubfoot, then moved on. "Warlock?"

The Warlock nodded.

"I thought I'd killed you. You were two hundred years old when I cancelled your longevity spells."

"I was able to renew them. Partly. I give you a technical victory, Wavyhill. It was my ally who defeated you."

"Technical victory!" There was hysteria in the skull's falsetto laughter. "That werewolf rug merchant kept tearing and tearing at me! It went on forever and ever, and I couldn't die! I couldn't die!"

"It's over."

"I thought it wouldn't ever be over. It went on and on, a piece of me gone every time he got close enough—" The skull stopped, seemed to consider, its expression was unreadable, of course. "I don't hurt. In fact, I can't feel much of anything. There was a long time when I couldn't feel or see or hear or smell or... Did you say twenty years? Warlock, what do I look like?"

The Warlock detached a mirror from the wall, brought it end held it. Wavyhill's skull studied itself for a time. It said, "You just had to do that, didn't you?"

"I owed you one. Now you have a decision to make. Do you want to die? I can cancel the spell of immortality you

put on yourself."

"I don't know. Let me think about it. What do you want of me, Warlock?"

"Some technical help."

The skull laughed. "From me?"

"You were the world's first necromancer. You were powerful enough to defeat me," said the Warlock. "The power you gained you used for evil, but nobody doubts your skill. Tomorrow I meet two powerful magicians. We'll want your advice."

"Do I know of them?"

"Piranther. Mirandee."

"Piranther! He came all the way from the South Land Mass? Why?"

"We're trying to hold off the approaching end of civilization."

The skull chuckled. "I'd like to see that meeting. Piranther walked out on your conference, didn't he? After you called him a short-sighted fool. I heard that he took a whole colony of his people to the South Land Mass and swore never to come back."

"You heard right. And he never did come back, but he's coming now."

The skull was silent for a time. Then it said, "You've roused my interest. I don't care to die just now. Under the circumstances that may be silly, but I can't help it. Can you make me a whole man again?"

"Look at me."

Pouchy, wrinkled skin masked the strong lines of the Warlock's face. He still preferred to wear nothing above the waist. The purpose of that habit had been lost; the habit remained. It showed him to disadvantage now. His ribs protruded. His small pot belly protruded. His vertebrae marched like a tiny mountain range across the fading links of the empty demon train.

The skull sighed mournfully.

"I'd wish my youth back," said the Warlock. "If wishing was all it took. Look at me. I was young for two hundred years. Now the spells are failing. All spells are failing."

"So you need a necromancer." The dots on the grapes turned to Clubfoot. "Are you involved in this madness too?"

"Of course."

The Warlock said, "Wavyhill, meet Clubfoot."

"A pleasure. I'd take hands, but you see how it is," said Wavyhill.

Clubfoot was not amused. "One day you may have hands again, but you will never take my hand. I've seen the villages you gutted. I helped kill you, Wavyhill."

The dots on the grapes turned back to the Warlock. "And this tactless boor is to be our ally? Well, what is your project?"

"We're going to discuss means of restoring the world's merriment."

The skull's laugh was high and shrill.



old tradition here, dating from a time when starstone was plentiful.

The Warlock sang as he worked. He was an old man, tall and lean, his head bald as an egg, his voice thin and reedy. But he could hold a tune. The words he sang belonged to a language no longer used except by members of the Sorcerers' Guild.

He knotted a loop of thin leather thong to mend the broken jaw hinge. Other strips of thong went along the cheekbones, the jaw hinges, the ears. Many overlapped. When he finished they formed a crude diagram of the muscles of a human face.

The Warlock stepped back, considering. He cut up a sheet of felt and glued two round pads behind the ear holes. A longer strip went inside the jaws, the back and glued to the table between the

The Warlock waited it out. Presently he said, "Are you finished?"

"Possibly. Will it take all five of us?"

"I tried to call a full meeting of the Guild. Only ten answered the call. Of the ten, three felt able to travel."

"Has it occurred to you that magic can only use up mana? Never restore it?"

"We're not fools. What about an outside source?"

"Such as?"

"The Moon."

The Warlock expected more laughter. It did not come. The skull said, "I never would have thought of that in a thousand years. Still... why not? Starstones are rich in mana. Why not the Moon?"

"With enough mana, end the right spells, you could be humen again."

"And so could you, Warlock. But where would we find magic powerful enough to reach the Moon?"

The door rocked to thunderous knocking.

The magicians froze. Then Clubfoot stripped a bracelet from his upper arm. He looked through it at the door. "No magic involved," he said. "A mundane."

"What would a mundane want with us?"

"Maybe the building's on fire." Clubfoot raised his voice. "You, there—"

Neither the old spells, nor the old bar across the door, were strong enough. The door exploded inward behind a tremendous lock. An armed man stepped into the room and looked about him.

"I have to talk to a magician," he told them.

"You are interrupting magicians engaged in private business," said the Warlock. No sane man would have needed more warning.

The intruder was raggedly shaved, his long black hair raggedly chopped at shoulder length. His dark eyes studied two men and a skull decorated with macabre humor. "You are magicians," he said wonderingly. In the next instant he almost died; for he drew his sword, and Clubfoot raised his arms.

The Warlock shook Clubfoot's shoulder. "Stop! It's broken!"

"Yes, I broke it," said the intruder. He looked at the bladeless hilt, then suddenly threw it into a corner of the room. He took two steps forward and closed hands like bronze clamps on the Warlock's thin shoulders. He looked searchingly into the Warlock's face. He said, "Why did it happen?"

Clubfoot's arms were raised again.

Human beings are fragile, wtery things. Death spells are the easiest magic there is.

"Back up end start over," said the Warlock. "I don't know what you're talking about. Who are you?"

"Orolandes. Greek soldier."

"Why did you break your sword?"

"I hated it. I thought maybe it happened because of the people I killed. Not the other soldiers. The priests."

Clubfoot exclaimed, "You were in the Atlantis invasion!"

"Yes. We finally invaded Atlantis. First time Greeks ever got that far." Orolandes released the Warlock. He looked like a sleepwalker; he wasn't seeing anything here in the room. "We came for slaves and treasure. That's all."

And trade advantage," said the Warlock.

"Uh? Maybe. Nobody told me anything like that. Anyway, we won. The armies of Atlantis must have gotten soft. We went through them like they were nothing. But the priests were something else. They stood in a long line on the steps of the big temple and waved their arms. We got sick. Some of us died. But we kept coming,



crawling—I was crawling, anyway—and we got to them and killed them. And then Atlantis was ours."

He looked with haunted eyes at the magicians. "Ours. At last. Hundreds of years we'd dreamed of conquering Atlantis. We'd take their treasure. We'd make them pay tribute. But we never, we never wanted to kill them all. Old men, women, children, everyone. Nobody ever thought of that."

"You son of a troll. I had friends in Atlantis," said Clubfoot. "How did you live through it? Why didn't you die with the rest?"

"Uh? There was a big gold Tau symbol at the top of the steps. We were laughing and bragging and binding up our wounds when the land started to shake. Everybody fell over. The Tau thing cracked at the base and fell on the

steps. Then someone pointed west, and the horizon was going up. It didn't look like water. It was too misty, too big. It looked like the horizon was getting higher and higher."

"I crawled under the Tau thing with my back against the step. Captain Iason was shouting that it wasn't real, it was just an illusion, we must have missed some of the priests. The water came down like the end of the world. I guess the Tau thing saved my life—even the water couldn't move it, it was so heavy—but it almost killed me too. I had to get out from under it and try to swim up."

"I grabbed something that was floating up with me. It turned out to be part of a wooden roof. I got on it. A centaur girl came swimming by and I hauled her up on the roof. I thought, well, at least I saved one of them. And then she just fell over."

Clubfoot said, "There's magic in centaur metabolism. Without mana she died."

"But what happened? Did we do it?"

"You did it," said Clubfoot.

"I thought... maybe... you'd say..."

"You did it. You killed them all."

The Warlock said, "Atlantis is tectonically unstable. Was. It should have been under the ocean hundreds of years ago. Only the spells of the priest-kings have kept it above the waves this long."

Orolandes nodded dumbly. He turned to the door.

"Stop him," said Wavyhill. As Orolandes turned to the new voice, the skull snapped. "You. Swordsman. How would you like a chance to make amends?"

Orolandes gaped at the talking skull.

"Well? You wiped out a whole continent, people and centaurs and merpeople and all. You broke your sword, you were so disgusted at yourself. How would you like to do something good for a change? Keep it from happening to others?"

"Yes."

Clubfoot said, "What is this?"

"We may need him. I may know of a mana source, a big one."

"Where?"

"I'll reserve that. Do the words 'god within a god' mean anything to you?"

"No."

"Good." The skull chuckled. "We'll see what develops tomorrow. See to it that this... Orolandes is with us when we meet your friends. You, Orolandes, have you got a room here?"

"I can get one."

"Meet us at dawn, for breakfast."

Orolandes nodded and walked out. There was no spring in his walk. His sword hit the left lying in a corner.

From Prissith's gate one could make out an elliptical depression, oddly regular, in the background of low green hills. Time had eroded Fistfall's borders; they disappeared as one came near. Greenery had covered the pits and dirt piles where earlier men had dug for star-stone. From what must be the rim, Orolandes could see only that the land sloped gradually down, then gradually up again.

It was just past sunrise; there was still shadow in the hollow. Orolandes shivered in the morning chill.

The old man did not shiver, though he walked naked to the waist. A talking skull sat on his shoulder, fastened by straps over the lower jaw. He and the skull and the younger man chatted as they walked: trivia mixed with incomprehensible shop talk mixed with reminiscence from many lifetimes.

Orolandes shivered. He had fallen among magicians, willingly and by design, and he was not sure of his sanity. Before that terrible day in Atlantis he would never have considered a magician to be anything but an enemy.

In the village of the fisherfolk Orolandes had waited for the images to go away. Don't speak of it, don't think of it; the memories would fade.

But in the dark of sleep the sea would rise up and up and over to swallow the world, with his spoils and his men and the people he'd conquered. He would snap awake then, to stare into the dark until it turned light.

Or on a bright afternoon he would heave at the awkward weight of a net filled with fish... and he would remember pulling at the limp, awkwardly right-angled centaur girl, trying to get her up on the broken roof. She'd *had* to lie on her side; he'd felt unspeakably clumsy trying to give her artificial respiration. But he'd seen her breath at last! He'd seen her eyelids flicker open, seen her head lift and look at him... seen the life go out of her then, draining away to somewhere else.

What had happened that day? If he knew why, then the horror would leave him, and the guilt... He had clung to that notion until last night. Now he knew. What the magicians had told him was worse than he had imagined.

The notion he clung to now might be the silliest of all. Orolandes could read nothing in the white bone face of the dead magician. Even to its friends it was a tolerated evil. But nobody else had offered Orolandes any breath of comfort.

On the strength of a skull's vague promise, he was here. He would wait and see

and his hearing sharpened, his normal dyspepsia eased. Over the centuries the townspeople had removed every tiniest fragment of the boulder that had come flaming down from the skies; but vaporized rock had condensed and sifted down all over this region, and there was no removing it. Old spells took new strength.

Down then in the shadow, two walked uphill toward them.

"I recognize Mirandee," said Clubfoot. "Would that be Prencher?"

"I think so. I only met him once."

Clubfoot laughed. "Once was enough?"

"I'm surprised he came. We didn't part as friends. I was so sure I was right, I got a little carried away. Well, but that was fifty years ago." The Warlock turned to the swordsman. "Orolandes, I should have said it before. You can still turn back."

The big man's hand kept brushing his empty scabbard. He looked at the



Warlock with too-wide eyes and said, "No."

You are about to learn the secrets of magicians. It isn't likely you'll learn too much, but if you do, we may have to tamper with your memory."

It was the first time the Warlock had seen him smile. The swordsman said, "There are parts you can cut out while you're about it."

"Do you mean that?"

"I'm not sure. What kind of a man is that? Or is it the woman's familiar?"

The man approaching them was small and dark-skinned and naked in the autumn chill. His hair was white and puffy as a ripe dandelion. A skin bag hung on a thong around his neck.

"His people come from the South Land Mass," said Clubfoot. "They're powerful and touchy. Be polite."

Prencher's companion was a head

taller than he was, a slender woman in a vivid blue robe. Snow-white hair fell to her waist and bobbed with her walk. Mirandee and the Warlock had shared a dwelling in a year long past, sharing knowledge and other things, experimenting with sex magic in a way that was only partly professional.

But now her eyes only brushed the Warlock and moved on. "Clubfoot, a pleasure to see you again! And your friends." Visibly she wondered what the scarred, brawny, bewildered man was doing here. Then she turned back to the Warlock, and the blood drained from her face.

What was this? Was she reacting to the bizarre decorated skull on his shoulder? No. She took a half-step forward and said, "Oh my gods! Warlock!"

So that was it. "The magic goes away," he told her gently. "I wish I'd thought to send you some warning. I see that your own youth spells have held better."

"Well, but I'm younger. But are you all right?"

"I live. I walk. My mind is intact. I'm two hundred and forty years old, Mirandee."

Wavyhill spoke from the Warlock's shoulder. "He's in better shape than I am."

The woman's eyes shifted, her brow lifted in enquiry.

"I am Wavyhill, Mirandee, I know you by reputation."

"And I you." Her voice turned winter-cold. "Warlock, is it proper that we deal with this... murderer?"

"For his skill and his knowledge, I think so."

The skull cackled. "I know too much to be absent, my dear. And the Greek soldier is here because I think we may need him. Trust me, Mirandee, and forgive me the lives of a few dozens of mundanes. We're here to restore the magic that once infused the world. I want that more than you do. Obviously."

But Mirandee was looking at the Warlock when she answered Wavyhill. "No. You don't."

The age-withered black man spoke for the first time. "Skull, I sense the ambition in you. Otherwise you conceal your thoughts. What is it you hide?"

"I would bow if I could. Prencher, I am honored to meet you," said Wavyhill. "Do you know of the god within a god?"

Prencher's brow wrinkled. "These words mean nothing to me."

"Then I have knowledge you need. A point for bargaining. Please notice that I am more helpless than any infant. On that basis, will you let me stay? I won't ask you to trust me."

The Warlock felt uncommonly alive. As they moved into Fistfall his vision

Pirenther's eyes shifted. His face was as blank as his mind, and his mind was as dark and hidden as the floor of the ocean. "Warlock, I should be grateful that you still live. And you must be Clubfoot; I know you by reputation. But who are you, sir?"

"Orolandes. I, I was asked to come."

Wavyhill said, "I asked him. His motives are good. Let him stay."

Piranther half-smiled. "On trust?"

Wavyhill snorted. "You're a magician, they say. Read his mind. He hasn't the defenses of a turtle."

That, and Piranther's slow impassive nod. "No!" cried Orolandes, and his hand spasmed above the empty scabbard. He backed away.

The skull said, "Stop it, Greek. What have you to hide?"

Orolandes moaned. His guilt was agony; he wanted to burrow in the ground. One flash of hate he felt for these who would judge him; for the Warlock's sympathy, the woman's cool curiosity, the black demon's indifference, the red magician's irritation at time-wasting preliminaries. But Orolandes had already judged himself. He stood fast.

Corpses floated in shoals around his raft. They covered the sea as far as the horizon. Sharks and killer whales leapt among them...

Piranther made a grimace of distaste. "You might have warned me. Oh, very well, Wavyhill, he's certainly harmless. But he trusts you no more than I do."

"And why should he?"

Piranther shrugged. He settled gracefully onto a small grassy hillock. "I had hoped to be addressing thirty or forty trained magicians. It bodes ill for us that no more than four could come—I exclude you, Wavyhill, because you could not have travelled on your own. But here we are. Topic for discussion, anyone?"

There was an awkward pause. Clubfoot said, "If nobody else wants to..."

"Proceed."

Mirandee and the Warlock settled cross-legged on the ground.

Clubfoot looked toward Mount Valhalla, collecting his thoughts. He may have been regretting his temerity. After all, he was the youngest of the magicians present. Well—

"First there were the gods," he said. "Earth sparkled with magic in those days, and nothing was impossible. The first god almost certainly created himself. Later gods may not have been that powerful, but there are tales of mountains piled one on another to reach sky-dwelling gods and overthrow them, of a god torn to pieces and the fragments forming whole pantheons, of the

sun being stopped in its track for trivial purposes. The gods' lives were fueled by magic, not chemistry, and they used mana at a ferocious rate. Eventually the mana level dropped too low, and the gods died. But before they did, some of them played at making other forms of life.

"The gods' creations were their survivors. Some, like men and foxes and rabbits, use only chemical metabolism. This seems to be the same principle that makes fire possible, and fire is almost entirely non-magical. Other beasts and plants use chemistry and mana. Unicorns, for instance, survive in mana-poor regions, though the colts are born with stunted horns. But many mana-dependent peoples are going mythical: merpeople, dragons, centaurs. Uh, may I show you something?"

Clubfoot pulled a cloth bag from his satchel. From the bag he shook a blob of greyish jelly with darker nodules in it.

In his youth the Warlock had killed carnivorous goo the size of houses. To a mere warrior they were more dangerous than dragons; swords were generally too short to reach the nucleus. Clubfoot's goo was no bigger than a fist. It was formless and translucent, with darker grey organs and vacuoles of food showing within its body. It arched itself in the morning sunlight and tried to flow into Clubfoot's shadow.

"I thought you might be interested," said Clubfoot. "These goo are named for the first word spoken by an infant. Said to be children of the first god: formless, adaptable, created in his image. We found this in the desert where an ancient city once stood and where the mana is very poor. When the world is barren of magic the goo will still be around, but they'll probably be too small to see."

"And we'll still be around," Clubfoot finished, "but we'll be farmers or merchants or entertainers. Mundanes. And the swordsmen will rule the world. That's why we're gathered here."

"Thank you," Piranther looked about him. "Suggestions?"

Mirandee said, "What about your project, Pirenther? Fifty years ago you were going to map the mana-rich regions of the world."

"And I said that was self-limiting," said the Warlock.

"And you called me a short-sighted fool." Still Piranther wore no expression. "It seems that you were right. As you know, there are mana-rich regions, places that human magicians never reached or never settled. I need hardly point out that they are the least desirable places in the world. The land beneath the ice of the South Pole. In the north, the ice itself. The clouds. Any fool who watches clouds can tell you they're

magic. I know spells to render them solid, and spells to shape them into castles and the like."

"So do I," said the Warlock.

"So did Sheefyre," Mirandee said dryly. "The witch Sheefyre will not be joining us. She took a fall. Where are you on a cloudscape when the mana runs out?"

"Precisely," Piranther resumed. "The South Land Mass was probably infested with demons until recently. They're gone now; all we have of them is the myth of a Hell under the world. But why else should the fifth largest land mass in the world have been uninhabited until we came?"

"You know that when we finished our map project I took my people there, all who would go. The mene is rich. There are new fruits and roots and meat animals. On a nearby land mass is a giant bird, the moa, the finest meat animal in the world—"

The Warlock grinned. "Do I hear an invitation to emigrate?"

"You do not. You were right. Mapping mene-rich places only brings magicians to use up the mene. The castles we



raised along the coast are falling down. The embrosia is dying. We must migrate inland. I fear the results if my students can't learn to use less powerful magic."

"They'll go further and further inland," Mirandee said in a dreamy voice, "using the mana as they go." Her face was blank, her eyes blind. Sometimes the gift of prophecy came on her thus, without warning. "Thousands of years from now the swordsmen will come, to find small black people in the barren center of the continent, starving and powerless, making magic with pointing-bones that no longer work."

"There is no need to be so vivid," Piranther said coldly.

Mirandee started. Her eyes focused. "Was I talking? What did I say?"

But nobody thought it tactful to tell her. Clubfoot cleared his throat and said, "Undersea?"

The Warlock shook his head. "No good. Same problems as living in the clouds, but worse, unless you're a merman. There's nothing to breathe in

the water, and the mana is in the sea floor. When the spells fail, where are you?" He looked around him. "Shall we face facts? There's no place to hide. If we can't bring the magic back to the world, we might as well give it to the swordsmen."

Piranther asked, "Do you have something in mind?"

"An outside source. The Moon."

Nobody laughed. Even the Greek swordsman only gaped at him. Piranther's wrinkled face remained immobile as he said, "You must have been thinking this through for hundreds of years. Is this really your best suggestion?"

"Yes. Silly as it sounds. May I expound?"

"Of course."

"I don't have to say anything that isn't obvious. Stones and iron fall from the sky every night. They burn out before they touch earth. Their power for magic is low: it has to be used fast, while they still burn."

"Some star-stones do reach earth. The bigger they are, the more power they carry. Correct?" The Warlock did

Mirandee was exasperated. "Well, then, does anyone know how big the Moon is? Because the bigger it is, the higher it must be, and the harder it's going to hit! It could be thousands of miles up!"

"It must be tremendous," Piranther said. "From Iceland and from the South Land Mass, it looks exactly the same. Nothing remotely as large has ever struck earth. Otherwise we'd find old records of it in the sky, records of a time when there were two moons."

"We'll have to give it plenty of room, if we solve the other problems." The Warlock hesitated. "I'd thought of the Gobi Desert."

Wavyhill said, "There's even more room in the Pacific."

Clubfoot made a rude noise. "Tidal waves. And we couldn't get to it after it sank." He tugged thoughtfully at a single braid of straight black hair. "Why not the South Pole? No, forget I said that. The Moon never gets over the Poles."

Piranther wore an irritating half-smile. "Basics, brothers, basics. We don't know how big the Moon is. We don't know what it weighs, or what holds it up. We don't have magic powerful enough to reach it. You're all thinking like novices, trying to do it all in one crackling powerful ceremony of enchantment, whereas in fact we need spells and power to reach the Moon, and study it, and learn enough to tell us what to do next, and finally to use that magic to tap the Moon's power." His smile deepened. "There is nothing in the world today that is sufficiently sacred to do all that. Warlock, you once called me a short-sighted fool. I will not call you short-sighted. Your daydream would be work for generations, if it could be done at all."

The Warlock was not pleased.

"What exactly are you gloating about? We had the big conference fifty years ago. The power existed, then. But you and your group wanted to make maps."

Piranther's half-smile disappeared. His small black hand stroked the skin bag at his chest—and forces could be felt gathering.

"I know of a mana source," said the skull on the Warlock's shoulder.

Wavyhill saw that he had everyone's attention. "I thought I had better interrupt while we still had a conference. I wish I could give guarantees, but I can't. I may know of a living god, the last in the world. I'll lead you to it."

"I find this hard to believe," Piranther said slowly. "A remaining god? When even the dragons are nearly gone? When half the world's fishing industries

are run by men, from boats, because the merpeople have died off?"

"It seems more believable when you know the details. I'll tell you the details, and I'll lead you to it," said Wavyhill. "But I want oaths sworn. To the best of your abilities, when we have gained sufficient mana for the spells to work, will each of you do your best to return me to my human form?"

Nobody hurried to answer.

"Remember, your oaths will be binding. A geas is more powerful than any natural law, in a high-mana environment. Well?"

"I had other projects in mind," Piranther said easily. "Your oath would claim too much of my time. Also, you have a much greater interest in the Warlock's project than any of us."

"Your interest isn't slight," said Wavyhill. "We who pull down the power of the Moon will rule the world."

"True enough. But why should you have a head start on the rest of us while we fulfill your geas? Swear us the same oath, Wavyhill. Then we can all scurry about for ways to put you back together again. Otherwise we'll wake to find you ruling us."

"Willingly," said Wavyhill, and he swore.

Piranther listened with his half-smile showing, while Mirandee and the Warlock, and, reluctantly, Clubfoot swore Wavyhill's oath.

Then, "I will not swear," said Piranther. "Thus I presume you will not guide me?" He stood, lithely, and walked away. If he expected voices calling him back, there were none, and he walked away toward Pnssthill.

"That means trouble," said Wavyhill. "We can do it without him," said Clubfoot.

"You don't follow me," said Wavyhill. "I meant what I said. If we fail, there is no world. If we draw the power of the Moon, we rule the world. If Piranther follows us and learns what we learn, and if Piranther is there when we pull down the Moon or whatever, he's the only one of us who can concentrate purely on controlling it."

Clubfoot saw it now. "You and your stupid oath."

"He won't follow us," said the Warlock.

The Mountain

They climbed Mount Valhalla on foot: three magicians, two porters hired in Pnssthill, Orolandes carrying a porter's load, and the skull of Wavyhill still moored to the Warlock's shoulder.

He had hired the porters, he had chosen their equipment, but Orolandes had no idea why he was going up a mountain. He had asked Wavyhill. "Is the last god at the peak, then?"

"Clear us for the peak," Wavyhill had told him, "and don't think too much."

(Continued on page 62)



not wait for an answer. "The Moon is huge. Watch it at moonrise and you'll know. It should carry enormous power—far more than the Fist carried, for instance. In fact, it must. What else but magic could hold it up? I suggest that the Moon carries more mana than the world has seen since the gods died."

"But you don't need me to tell you that, do you?—Orolandes, is there magic in the Moon?"

The ex-soldier started. "Why ask me? I know no magic." He shrugged uncomfortably. "All right, yes, there's magic in the Moon. Anyone can feel it."

"We all know that," said Piranther. "How do you propose to use it?"

"I don't know. If our spells could reach the Moon at all, its own mana would let us land it."

"This all seems very... hypothetical," Mirandee said delicately. "I don't know what holds the Moon up. Do you? Does anyone?"

There were blank looks. Wavyhill's skull cackled. "We could pull the Moon down and find we'd used up all the mana doing it."

Charlie Brown's Fan Scene

BY CHARLES N. BROWN

Science Fiction fans are, at least among themselves, a gregarious and friendly lot. They not only produce the hundreds of general fanzines and semi-professional magazines I'll be covering in this column, but also a large number of "letter substitutes" or personal fanzines sent to a limited number of people. In order to keep in touch with each other, they also form clubs, attend conventions, and help support Ma Bell and the Post Office. Although this column is supposed to be mainly devoted to fanzines, I'd like, from time to time, to write about some other aspects of the science fiction fan field.

Conventions usually feature a guest of honor, panels and talks on science fiction and related subjects, milling and talking, and parties far into the night. There are small local conventions, medium sized regional conventions, large national conventions, and gigantic world conventions. All are open to anyone who pays the registration fee involved. If you live in the neighborhood or don't mind traveling, you will probably enjoy yourself. Since this column is written far in advance of publication (I'm writing this on February 21, 1976), I can't list individual cons for you. If you're interested, I'd particularly recommend LOCUS to you. It carries a complete list of upcoming conventions every two or three issues. I can mention that the world convention this year, MidAmeriCon, will be held Sept. 2-6 at the Muehlebach hotel in Kansas City. Robert A. Heinlein is Guest of Honor and membership is \$25.00 between May 1 and August 1, \$50.00 after. If you can't attend, you can buy a supporting membership for \$6.00 which will bring you copies of their publications and allow you to vote for the Hugo awards.

Write MidAmeriCon, Box 221, Kansas City, MO 64141 for further details. Now, on to the fanzines:

ALGOL: The Magazine About Science Fiction has an excellent Jack Gaughan cover on its Winter 1976 issue. Inside is a fine autobiographical article by Robert Silverberg, "Sounding Brass, Tinkling Cymbal," which has appeared before in the book *HELL'S CARTOGRAPHERS* and in the academic fanzine *Foundation*. The present version has a short postscript covering 1974-1975. There is also an interview with Gardner Dozois, excellent book reviews by Richard Lupoff, and columns by Greg Benford and Ted White. The latter column is somewhat dated and the editorial too meandering, but these are minor flaws. The magazine is highly recommended. ALGOL is published twice per year and is \$16.00 or \$1.50 each from ALGOL, Box 4175, New York, N.Y. 10017.

Science Fiction Review 16, dated February 1976, is 48 pages of small type printed on newsprint. Four pages of text are done in red ink guaranteed to inflame the eye. The layout is awful with reviews, letters, articles, fillers, and comments scattered randomly throughout. This was acceptable when the editor was mimeographing the magazine, but is ridiculous when it can be pasted up in any order for the present photo-offset reproduction. The magazine is also fascinating to read. The editor, Richard Geis, writes well and is opinionated enough to annoy anybody with something or other in the issue, be it opinions on books, politics, economics, sexism, etc. He also draws lively and interesting comments in response. This issue has a long interview with Jerry Pournelle, reviews by Barry

Malzberg and Dick Lupoff, columns by John Brunner and Jon Gustafson, letters by Coney, Ellison, Asimov, de Camp, and others, plus more goodies. It's a reading experience. *Science Fiction Review* is published quarterly and costs \$1.25 each or \$4.00 per year from P.O. Box 11408, Portland, OR 97211.

LOCUS: The Newspaper of the Science Fiction Field published two issues, 183 and 184, in January. Each is eight pages of fine print with news, reviews, and information on SF. Issue 183 has a complete list of 1976 conventions as well as a summary of 1975 books with a recommended reading list. There are also obituaries of Leo Margulies and Richard Shayer, reports on past conventions and the usual information on forthcoming books, what authors are doing, and market reports for writers. Issue 184 has more of the same plus a breakdown of 1975 publishing (890 SF books were published), a long column on future SF movies, and reviews of important books. An important source of information about SF, LOCUS is published 15 times a year and is available for \$6.00 a year in North America. A sample copy is 50¢. Write: LOCUS Publications, P.O. Box 3938, San Francisco, CA 94119.

Outworlds 26, dated Fourth Quarter 1975, features transcriptions of David Gerrold's two Westerner speeches, an interview with James Gunn, columns by Paul Anderson, Robert A. W. Lowndes, and Ted White, controversy between Piers Anthony and Dean Koontz, and much more. It's highly recommended. *Outworlds* is \$1.25 per issue, \$5.00 per year (4 issues) from William L. Bowers, Box 2521, North Canton, OH 44720.

If you like to read book reviews to see if others agree with your tastes or like to see a book reviewed before shelling out hard cash for it, the current crop of review journals should be of interest to you. The above magazines, with the exception of *Outworlds*, all have a lot of reviews, but they're not devoted entirely to them as are Delap's *F&SF Review*, *The Science Fiction Review Monthly* (not to be confused with *Science Fiction Review*) and *SF Booklog*.

Delap's *F&SF Review* is my personal favorite. The January 1976 issue is 32 8 1/2 x 11 printed pages of reduced text with reviews of 26 books, reproductions of covers, an extremely useful list of all the books scheduled for January release. It's the best looking of the three review magazines and, on the average, has longer reviews. The only major fault with the magazine is a tendency toward long "killer" reviews. They're the easiest to write, but are a waste of space if you're trying to use

the magazine as a buying guide. *De-lap's F&SF Review* is \$1.00 per issue, \$9.00 per year for individuals, from 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, CA. 90230. It is published monthly.

The Science Fiction Review Monthly is 24 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 pages with fairly large type making it much shorter than the other two magazines. The January 1976 issue reviews 43 books. Most reviews are very brief. It has no editorial matter, no illustrations, etc. The main advantage of the magazine are the services of Baird Searies—one of my favorite reviewers. He has eight reviews in this issue. The publisher does not sell individual copies although they will sell you back issues at \$1.25 each. Subscriptions are \$10.00 per year from *The Science Fiction Review*, 56 Eighth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014.

SF Booklog #7 is dated Jan./Feb. 1976 and is 24 pages of 11 x 17" newsprint. It reviews 97 books, has fanzine reviews, illustrations, and some editorial matter. *SF Booklog* is the most uneven of the three magazines, but has been improving with each issue. It uses a lot of freelance reviews—some very good, some very poor. If you want to try writing reviews yourself, this may be very useful as a market. *SF Booklog* is 50¢ per issue, \$5/\$3.00 from K. L. Justice, Route 3, Box 42, Union, Mass. 01985.

The above journals are devoted to reviews as opposed to criticism. They don't try to delve too deeply into a book and they assume you haven't read it. Good critical journals on the other hand, are rare. One such is *Foundation: The Review of Science Fiction*. Issue 9, dated Nov. 1975, is a 121 page oversize paperback with an autobiographical article by Richard Cowper, a long critical article on Ballard, Aldiss, and Moorcock, and a collection of good critical reviews of a dozen important books. *Foundation* is published in England and the books reviewed are British editions. This can give you a curious timebinding effect since some of the titles reviewed appeared here in the United States several years ago and some of them have not yet appeared here. Subscriptions are \$7.50 per year (three issues) from *The Science Fiction Foundation*, Northeast Polytechnic, Longbridge Road, Essex RM8, 2AS, England.

Khatru, edited by Jeff Smith, is usually a very good critical magazine. I say "usually" because issue 3/4, dated November 1975, is a special number on women in science fiction with contributions by Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Kate Wilhelm, Virginia Kidd, and others.

It runs 156 mimeographed pages and is fascinating. Unfortunately, Jeff only printed 350 copies and it will probably be out of print by the time this mention appears. The comments, which should be in the next issue, should be just as interesting. *Khatru* is published quarterly and is 4/\$4.00 from Jeffrey D. Smith, 1339 Weldon Ave., Baltimore, MD 21211. Make checks payable to the editor.

The Witch and the Chameleon is a quarterly feminist science fiction magazine. Issue 4, dated September 1975, is 32 pages long and has letters by Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Ursula K. Le Guin, Jack Williamson, Jerry Pournelle, Poul Anderson, and others as well as some short articles and reviews. It's a lively opinionated journal and costs \$3.25 for four issues from Amanda Bankier, 2 Paisley Ave. S., #6, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Starling is a well written fanzine devoted to all aspects of popular culture. Issue 32 is fairly typical and has Juanita Coulson on her experiences writing gothics, an excellent review column by Joe Sanders and other material—mostly on mysteries this issue. *Starling* is neatly mimeographed and has good interior artwork. It costs 50¢ or \$5/\$2.00 from Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell, 525 W. Main St., Madison, WI. 53703.

Fantasy fans should be aware of three societies that have replaced the now defunct Tolkien Society of America. The Fantasy Association issues an excellent monthly newsletter called *Fantasias* which reviews new books, discusses older ones, and has survey articles on mythic sources. Membership in the Association is \$6.00 per year in the U.S. from The Fantasy Association, Box 24560, Los Angeles, CA. 90024. The Mythopoeic Society is somewhat more limited in that it concentrates primarily on the works of Tolkien, Lewis, and Charles Williams. They publish several fanzines as well as a newsletter. The magazines are much more scholarly and esoteric than *Fantasias*, and unless you're a fanatic instead of just a reader, they may prove partially incomprehensible. For information, write The Mythopoeic Society, Box 4671, Whittier, CA. 90607. The British Fantasy Society also publishes a bulletin, holds conventions, sponsors awards, and, unlike the other two, also covers weird fiction and movies. For information, write Gordon Larkin, 113A High St., Shitstable, Kent CT5 1AY, United Kingdom.

Tabebuian, 26, dated January 1976, is a fine (4" x 7") printed journal of humor, reviews, letters, and other

items. In its 24 pages, there are articles on forming an arts coven, on teaching SF, on fanzines, and some odd letters. It's quite funny without being degrading or ingroup—a difficult and worthwhile accomplishment. *Tabebuian* is published at least monthly and is \$2/\$3.00 from Mardee Sue Jenrette, Box 330374, Miami, FL. 33133.

New Venture is a new magazine which shows a lot of promise. Issue #3, dated Winter 1975, is 48 pages of neat two column type with columns on art, books, films, fanzines, etc. There is an interview with Poul Anderson and fiction by Avram Davidson, and a good letter column. It isn't one of the top fanzines, but is one to watch. *New Venture* is published quarterly and is \$1.00 per issue, 4/\$4.00 from New Venture Publishing, Box 135, Pullman, WA. 99163.

If you really want to be in at the beginning of a magazine, you might try *Moonduist*. The first issue just appeared and it's a neatly printed 20 page journal with a transcript of a speech by Andy Offutt, an original short story by Thomas Burnett Swann, and an article on the language of DUNE. There is also artwork by Jack Gaughan. *Moonduist* is 75¢ per issue from Bob Roehm, 820 Cambridge Blvd. #165, Clarksville, IN. 47130.

Maya 9, dated November 1975, is 20 pages of fine print with some very good editorial material, an excellent review of Clarke's *IMPERIAL EARTH*, a report on the 1975 British convention, a column by Peter Weston on editing anthologies, and an interesting letter column. Maya is worth the trouble of sending money to England. Remember, you can't send a check. Cash or an international money order is needed. Maya is \$1.00 each or 4/\$3.00 from Robert Jackson, 21 Lyndhurst Rd., Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE12 9NT, United Kingdom.

None of the magazines reviews above run fiction. There's very little good amateur fiction but, if you want to try some of the magazines that do run it and help new authors learn to write, you might try some of the following:

The Diversifier, Box 2078, Oroville, CA. 95965. \$1.00 per issue.

Myrdin, 3952 W. Dundee Rd., Northbrook, IL. 60062. \$1.00 per issue.

Stardust, 70 Vermont St., Toronto, Ont., Canada M6G 1X9. 75¢ per issue. All three magazines pay for the fiction they run and are good markets for beginners.

Fanzines for review should be sent to: Charles N. Brown, P.O. Box 3938, San Francisco, CA. 94119. Remember, we can't review all we get nor will we review non-SF fanzines or those not generally available. ★

LOVE IN CITY

(Continued from page 20)

explained, "Don't get as much leftovers as I used to . . . not enough to feed them all anymore." Already, in those tarnished days before The Fall, the signs had begun to appear, for those able to read them. And Brenda had been one of the first to know the way our proud society was heading. But she never spoke about it, never questioned it, just got on with her simple business of helping out.

My gaze wandered over the cats, from the cats to Brenda, then back to my own hands clasped before me. I considered what they had in common and for the first time in my life I felt incomplete. I have felt so ever since, and I do not expect I will ever feel any different. The times no longer allow such luxuries. I did not know it then, but in the years to come I would often think of Brenda and curse her for what she had shown me. Other times I would bless and thank her, wherever she might be, for on that night I learned loving from Brenda Martin, and my life would never be again as it had been before.

"Please don't laugh at me, Peter," she said softly. "I . . . I couldn't bear to have you laugh at me. This is such a small thing, really, that I do for them, a few times a week. It doesn't harm anyone . . ."

Laugh at her? I wondered whatever had made her think that, for I felt then as I do now that I would rather have wept for what she had allowed me to share.

Slowly the cats began to creep away, one by one. Only a few at first, as if they were reluctant to leave this haven of peace and warmth, but soon the deep sound of their contentment had all but disappeared from the room. Their exodus was nowhere near as dramatic as their arrival had been; now that their bellies were full they crept away from the house and off through the lanes and alleyways and up over fences onto rooftops, moving as quietly as shadows. Only a few dallied behind, staying close to Brenda, as though they were unwilling to leave, and yet knowing that they must. She bent her head close to theirs and whispered words for their ears alone. I heard her crying softly to herself, and I wondered how the quality of tears would transform her face.

When the last of these stragglers had gone she stood up. Calmly, quietly, and still working from her deep sense of ritual, she began cleaning and stacking the plates in the corner. The few bits and pieces of bone that were left she

scraped into the plastic bag to dump somewhere.

I worked silently beside her, I could not have uttered a word to have broken the almost monastic silence we shared. When everything was finished, she took the wooden spoon and the large plate and hung them back above the mantelpiece. Then she turned around and looked at me, and there was a deeply felt expression in her eyes. "Thank you, Peter," she said. "For helping me." Then she blew out the candle and together we made our way out of the gutted house and back to our respective homes.

I often helped her feed the cats after that first strange night, and although I enjoyed being with her and we had fun looking after them, somehow it was never the same. The magic had become commonplace, but the work was still worthwhile.

Even now I can recall how my scalp bristled and my heart raced when I first heard the far off thunder of those hundreds of tiny feet hurrying across the rooftops, and if I try really hard I can even rescue Brenda's expression from those dingy corridors of memory. I can still see her sitting quietly among her cats, engaged with them in some surreal communion of the soul. And I can hear them thundering overhead like an express train, and scurrying down the walls and in through the door like a dark wave of hunger. But most of all I remember their strong, quiet dignity and the concentration they brought to their feast . . . and the solemn nature of their departure. And I wonder where Brenda is now, and whatever became of her—and yes, I sometimes curse her memory and for what she revealed to me. But only on times like this . . .

The rain has eased at last. From the roof of these flats I can see out across the crumbling slate rooftops of the older dwellings. In the moist dusk the grey tiles remind me incongruously of the backs of turtles.

I have been waiting so long in the rain that by now I am soaked through, but I have ceased to care. And although I am shivering with the cold and aching all over from my long wait, I am reluctant to climb down the four flights of stairs to the ground and return home with so little. But maybe tomorrow . . . ?

Now the rain has ceased altogether. There is a break in the dismal clouds and a fading shaft of late afternoon sunlight brightens the familiar rooftops. And I can see something moving out there.

Almost immediately my cramped muscles unwind and warmth floods into my hands. I grip the rifle carefully,

waiting. This is always the best time to catch them: before dusk when they have risen from their afternoon nap.

At first I have a hard time trying to make him out. Even with the telescopic sights, my eyes are not what they used to be, and in this light.

When I do pin him down I am surprised to discover he is such a prime specimen. I ease forward, raising the rifle a fraction to center him in the sights, but my hands won't stop trembling. I tell myself it's the cold, damn it, the cold: I've been up here too long. But in my heart I know that it is the memory of Brenda that makes me shiver so—Brenda and her enigmatic smile and the purring, well-fed cats in her lap. Her eyes reach out to me across a gulf of half a century, but I think of ins, my poor daughter, and her wasted child. Then my hands steady.

He is only a rooftop away, creeping stealthily along the edge of guttering between one house and the next. I have him dead center in the sights. Oh, God, how proud and beautiful he looks, with his head high sniffing the moist air. A magnificent ginger tom and well worth the long wait.

I calculate where he will fall, the distance I will have to cover before I reach him. He sniffs the air more strongly than before. I think he has sensed me at last. I have but a moment to . . .

His image wavers in the sight. Damn the rain! Damn the waiting! I wipe the sweat from my eyes and try again.

He is watching me, his big round face trapped in my telescopic sight. My finger tenses on the trigger . . . falters. Dear God, I pray. And then, *For the child* . . .

I hear the familiar crack from the rifle. The bullet strikes him in the head and he drops without a sound, this fine animal who has fed well on the refuse of The Fall and whose flesh will now serve to enable a mother and child to endure a fraction longer in this miserable society.

His body falls out and away from the roof and hits the pavement with a thud. I am down the four flights of stairs in a flash, not wanting to lose my prize to any scavenger. I run as fast as my creaky old legs will carry me.

Outside I find it raining again. Yet I feel no fresh moisture on my skin. It is only in my eyes that I am aware of this driving mist.

I hasten to where he lies. I don't waste a moment but quickly bundle him into my shoulder pack, along with the other two. Three in one day. Now I can breathe easier. We will have enough roof rabbit to last a week—longer, if we're careful. Ins and the kid will be all right. And after that . . . well,

the days will take care of themselves for a little while longer, I guess.

Roof rabbit.

For a moment I wish that I had never known Brenda Martin in those years long since vanished, and that I had never been curious enough to have penetrated her mystery. But the feeling passes.

Then I hurry home, making good time and keeping to the side streets and alleyways, not because I am a coward and wish to avoid other scavengers—for I fear no one—but not wanting anyone to see an old man crying. ★

GHOSTS

(Continued from page 25)

library tapes, the history films. No, it is you we would know."

"Very well," Curran tried to determine a racial heritage in the finely chiseled cheekbones of the pair, the olive complexion that did not match the straw coloring of their hair. But origins were being obliterated under the influences of the new world. "My time is yours."

"Thank you," Lan Kan nodded, gravely. "Tell us—now that permission to land your cargo had been formally denied by the Council, what will you do?"

Curran glanced at the bush nearby, spotting the pale green strobil among the lavender leaves that was the closest to blossoms that the plants of this world possessed. He missed the blossoms, longed to be back in the plant rooms of the star ship where he could see the aster, the rose, even the modest stock. Many of them were forever lost, of course—but he had captured the last specimens and the most perfect specimens with his holograph.

"I miss most the birds," he said, softly.

"What is a birds?" asked Thai.

"Warm-blooded creatures capable of winged flight," said Lai Kan, impatiently. "You could not know them, Curran—they were already extinct when the first long sleep ships left Earth."

"But I have seen the old tapes," he said, sadly. "A planet of wide open skies that are not filled with the creatures of joy is an empty place, no matter what else may live along the ground."

He fumbled in his pocket, produced the collapsed holograph of a flower that was now only a blur of color. He snapped it into cubical shape with a practiced flip of the wrist, and stared at the spreading outer petals of the plumting red blossom.

"What is that?" asked Thai.

"A tulip—there are no more. This is

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the image of the most perfect one I could find. They used to come in many different colors."

"It is pretty," said the youth, passing the cube to the girl—but Curran saw that there was no enthusiasm in his voice. Yet he had expected no more. He accepted the cube back and collapsed again.

"What will I do?" He shrugged. "I don't know, I have not decided. Your world does not want my cargo, so I should take it to one that does. But I am old—I would never survive another journey."

"There is a system about seven ship-years from here," said Lai Kan, hesitantly. "It is a double-world system, two terranoid planets that revolve about a common center. One of the contact ships stopped there some forty or fifty years ago, for it was only a month or so out of their way. One of the twin worlds has a native hominid race that may develop intelligence in another million years—but the other is empty of all higher forms."

"Seven years? It might as well be seven centuries," Curran closed his eyes. "I doubt that I have a year left. And even if I do—how would I transfer my cargo down to the surface of the world without help? I could not do it by myself."

"There may be those who would go with you."

Curran leaned back, studying the youth, who would not meet his eyes. But Thai was looking at him, her brow lined with worry. She seemed anxious, even fearful.

"Who?" he demanded. "And why?"

"We are not all content, Curran. There are those among us dissatisfied to the point where, in the absence of opportunities to correct the situations that do not meet with our liking, we would leave this planet. The drop ships have limited crew space and no inclination to carry non-productive passengers. Yours is the only ship capable of transporting a large number of us."

"How many?"

"There are thousands, perhaps even more—we've not been able to poll the populace. But of our own group, forty have sworn determination—and perhaps a third of them would actually find the courage to leave."

"Do you need permission?"

"Yes—and it will not be granted. Too many of us are technicians. One or two malcontents might be released, but never the lot of us."

"My cutter has a capacity for twelve besides myself. Would I be able to return for a second load?"

"I am not at all sure that you will be permitted to leave, Curran—the systems of your ship are far more valuable than you realize."

"You expect trouble, then."

"Only if they anticipate our intentions. I doubt that there is any danger of that—you are the one we must protect. The idea of our leaving would not even occur to most of the people."

He considered: the thirty thousand meals he had consumed since leaving Earth had barely penetrated the capacity of the ship's stores, for they had known, guessed, even before departure, that the first planetfall might well prove to be inhospitable.

"You would help me? You would help care for my plants during the trip, transplant them to the surface after arrival—even if I am no longer there?"

"We would."

It was a bargain: there could be no further question. Curran had to agree.

"Select your twelve. How much time do you need?"

"Two weeks, to bring in those of our people at the sea farms. Once they are here, we will be ready—there is little we will try to take with us."

"Start, then," said the old man, and the youth at last turned to him, his face lighting.

"You won't regret this, Curran!"

He and the girl were gone then, leaving the old man nodding to himself. He hoped that the boy was right, that in this joint venture they would each achieve their most urgent goal. Perhaps he should press further the reason for Lai Kan's discontent—it might even be criminal in origin. But what business was it of his? The important thing was that he would not be trapped here, forced to watch as the starship waited in orbit, unable to finish the task.

When Curran announced to Juyles his decision to leave, his host seemed disturbed.

"I wish you would change your mind."

"Make me a place for my plants, and I will."

"I cannot; I am sorry. You must understand that our people do not want to be reminded of the planet they fled. It is better that Earth die completely."

"Better for who? Perhaps I will not live to see my plants safe into a new soil, but I must try—can you not understand?"

Juyles sighed. "Yes, I do understand."

Lai Kan was wrong in thinking that Juyles and those of his position would attempt to interfere with the old man's departure. It was a matter of obvious regret, but no more. And Juyles seemed happy when Curran said that he would spend two more weeks, to know for perhaps the last time the feel of a planet.

The day of departure arrived. Juyles not pressing his presence when Curran said that he would prefer to go to the spacecraft by himself. He was assigned a car and a driver, and spent the several hours of the drive to the north in studying the fields of native growth that he passed. He had to admit that the grasses and the outsized bushes that were the closest this planet possessed to trees were attractive—but they were not the flowering plants of Earth, not the tall conifers and spreading oaks that haunted his memory and pressed painfully against his heart. The latter were gone forever, for the first long sleep ships had discovered that the seeds of the trees would not root in the new soil. Only a living plant could put down roots under strange suns. But he possessed the images in his mind as well as in the holographs, and so long as his mind continued to function, their grandeur would not be lost.

The spacecraft was already in the control of Lai Kan and his fellows when Curran arrived, the single technician called to duty from his regular station at a nearby mining complex disgusted at being captured. Curran saw the reason for his disgust when he stepped out of the groundcar.

"They're just children!"

Lai Kan and Thai were the oldest among them; the others were for the most part in their middle teens, although one or two seemed barely into puberty.

"You're just running away from home!"

Lai Kan shook his head. "No, Curran. We may be young, but the only thing we're running from is the blindness of our parents. We're running to something—to the stars they have forgotten!"

The old man was dubious. "A long sleep ship is not a contact ship."

"No, but it can be converted, the star drives cut down to more manageable size, installed in the cutters if necessary. It will be hard, but we have time—seven years. That is our price for taking you and your plants to your new world, old man. We want your ship."

"Even a dozen is too many for a contact ship."

"Then we will have two ships—as many as we can build from the materials at hand. Come, Curran—we need you to teach us how to operate the star ship. Does not our bargain still stand?"

"Your parents will miss you."

"None of us have close family ties," said Lai Kan. "That was one of the criteria for selection—those who would be missed were left behind. Another was training—we are all technical students, already skilled. We have with us the tapes of what we do not know, in

(Continued on page 58)

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(Continued from page 56)

case your ship doesn't have the necessary material. We haven't had much time, but we've planned well."

Curran sighed. "You will miss your home."

"Then we will return, visit—if necessary, settle again."

Curran shrugged, started for the cutter. After a moment they fell in behind. There was excitement among them, and a good deal of chatter that did not stop until Curran keyed the ship into life and the alarm sounded. Then there was silence, all of them watching the monitor screens as they lifted from the surface. The mood lasted until they were into space and could see the globe of the planet taking shape below.

The old man did not live to see the new planet, although he survived another four years in the company of his burden of Earth's castaways. When he died there were those among the crew who would have turned off the chemical factories, begun now the work of converting the ship into the smaller

vessels that they would need.

But Lai Kan would not let them break the bargain. And three years later he supervised the transfer of the last of the surviving plants from Earth into the cutters for the trip down to the surface. Only when they had all been planted in climate areas similar to those they had known on Earth did he permit the others to start cutting the great ship apart, a task that occupied them for another three years. When they finished, three stubby contact ships remained in the midst of the debris that had been Star Ark.

Lai Kan and Thai took the last cutter down to the surface for one final visit. The ship touched down near the circle of pyranantha that surrounded the little cemetery. Within the circle of greenery were the forty graves of the crew that had left Earth, the other thirty-nine kept in stasis until this time.

"I'm glad that Curran did not live to see the results of his work," said Thai.

Already many of the transplanted

plants had passed through half a dozen generations, and now were mutating into the form of the native grasses—losing all resemblance to the shapes they had known on Earth. Even the berries of the pyranantha were changing, no longer red or yellow, but instead a pendulous violet that seemed almost fungoid. The tiny white blossoms were gone, but a dismal cloying perfume hung on.

Lai Kan found Curran's grave in the center of the plot, knelt beside it. There were no markers on the graves, but now he pulled one of the old man's holograms from his tunic, snapping it open. It was the tulip that Curran had carried with him almost everywhere.

He placed the cube of plastic in the center of the grave, then stood, brushing off his knee. Thai waited until at last he turned away.

"Perhaps none of us should know the results of our dreams," he said, forcing through the pyranantha to reach the cutter. He entered the ship without looking back again. ★

10,000 SPRINGS

(Continued from page 38)

of it being a late and artificial construction."

"That's about enough of that idea for one session, Cliveden," Ranwick said. "Whether I accept any of it or not, it needs more thinking over."

"Your own interests come into it, Ranwick. If a large part of the world is artificial, water-springs are surely among the most artificial parts of it."

"Yes. Artificial yes. That's what has been haunting me."

"Then loving a beautiful spring, as you do, would be a little bit like loving a beautiful woman, who turns out to be a robot."

"Yes," Ranwick Sorgente said. "It is the same thing. A spring and its Pegoid are the same thing. This is enough of it for a while."

Were the springs and their pegoids really artificial, as certain evidence would seem to indicate? Was Crescencia really a robot? There was something robotic about her mysterious threat at least. Ranwick read other things that were in the lodge, and he thought other thoughts. He had had hints before of the artificiality of a large part of the natural world, and now those hints were substantiating themselves. Well, he could accept it a little, that much of the world had been reinforced and patterned to preserve it from its own rampant naturalness. But the water? How would water be re-structured, how would it be unspooled?

Whatever thing was this chaotic water in the beginning, and how had they chaos been throttled? He was concerned a little bit about water: water-springs were the things that he had loved ten thousand times, and he had loved them (as he supposed) for the naturalness that he found in them.

Cliveden Houseghost left off from his metallurgical work and his regents and microscope.

"It isn't a thing to take too deeply to heart," he told Ranwick. "and besides, you must have suspected it for many years. Whoever had bitted and bridled the world is to be praised. The natural things are real nightmares whenever we get an accidental look at them. But I do want to find out what was really done, and when, and by whom. There is the quite recent iron and steel and chromed metals. There are the earlier bronzes. There are the still earlier iron-stones which are queer alloys of metals and stones that cannot be natural. There are still older tubes and channels of chalcedony and agate rock. There are the very hills skewed together with giant skewers. Well, goodnight, Ranwick Sorgente. Oh, my wife, as you may have noticed, is insane. But she is harmless. That is to say, in all minor matters she is harmless."

Ranwick still sat up a while. So the world was an artificial rock-garden that was confined, perhaps, to conceal a wilder garden behind it. So even the springs were—ah, no, let us not put that trammel on the springs tonight. Ranwick turned again to the notes of this Nigel Graystone who had died by drowning a year ago:

"Cure is a sewn-together world," the notes read, "and the word for 'sewn-together' is 'rhapsody.' A rhapsody is a sewing-together of songs. The vivifying elements of our world structure is the Hymn of the Rocks. And the Hymn became Flesh and dwelt amongst us. This is the body that is our world. And is it an artificial body? Certainly,

"All bodies are artificial, of course; and all bodies are resurrected bodies. The time of the latest resurrection of our present world body was the middle mesozoic. What we have are stones and mountains and continents and oceans, all sewn together with needles that are partly of metal and partly of rock. We do find steel and iron and bronze and iron-stone all through the artificial and intrusive concretions.

"We ask who did all this; we ask who was here before us, and who may be here yet. We say 'Somebody's been sitting in my chair' and we wonder who it was. Then we notice for the first time that ours is a giants' chair."

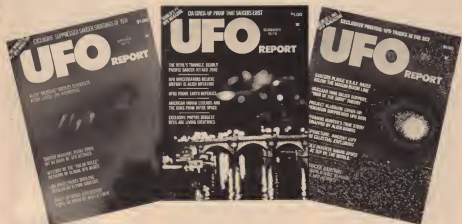
Ranwick set the folder of notes with other folders on a table there. Then he opened the folder that Cliveden Houseghost had assigned to him, and he made a notation:

"A feral fertile deposit of re-formed ore in an interlary tubulate shape is almost universal with water-springs."

He closed the folder again. He would write no more in it that night. He put his head down on the table and cried. He had written the shameful and sordid secret connected with all the beloved springs.

(Continued on page 60)

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After a while he went to bed.

After another while, a succubus in the form of a multiple-footed nightmare came to him. The succubus was a nightmare, yes, but it was also Crescentia Houseghost. No, Crescentia was not a night-crawler. She was still asleep in her bed somewhere there in the lodge. This was a dream sequence. It was the mountain full of water that is the unconscious, pouring out of an unthought and morasmal seep into an unshaped pool or sea. It was all chaotic water, and that was the trouble.

Crescentia was an unbridled nightmare of naturalness. She was horrifyingly chaotic; she did not have a countable number of legs, for instance, nor of eyes, nor of mouth or other things. So Ranwick bitted her and bridled her. That was all that was needed. It was, of course, a sorrowful thing to have to do. But, after it was done, she was in a rational form; she was a controlled nightmare.

Ranwick didn't like the chaotic and uncontrolled Crescentia. He didn't like the bitted and bridled Crescentia either. But somewhere, neither in this formlessness nor in this form, there was a Crescentia that he loved.

The next morning, after a structured and ordered breakfast with Cliveden, Ranwick Sorgente and Crescentia Houseghost were going up green-rock hills on the trail of wild water-springs. Crescentia, as always, was barefooted and boisterous under her yellow-flame hair. She soaked herself in the dew-bushes and in the clattering streams, and she soaked Ranwick with sopping embraces and smooches. "Drown in me, drown in me," she said once. She was as spunky as stump-water, as they used to say in the country.

But Ranwick was thoughtful about a world held together by stone-and-steel skewers and poured-concrete belaying-pins. He studied the strata of the rock outcroppings and he could see that, to a very great degree, they were artificial rock-garden stuff. He had this carry-over feeling that the opposite of artificial was chaotic rather than natural, and that the non-artificial could only be appraised by a chaotic mind.

"You hurt my mouth when you bitted me last night," Crescentia said with an impish and wet grin. "I would have carried you wherever you wanted to go anywhere. You didn't need to put a bit in my mouth to ride me."

"You crooked-grinning, hard-mouthed jade, no one could hurt you anyway," Ranwick said.

"Oh I know. I am only bantering you. That wasn't even in that dream. I was only watching it. Ride me with rowel-spurs if you want to. It will bleed me, but it won't hurt me."

"But I do want to see into your mouth, Crescentia," Ranwick said suddenly. "Whether it is bitted or not, whether it is hurt or not, I want to see."

"All right. Put your whole head in my mouth if you want to. I will be the animal and you be the animal-trainer." She knelt down before him there, and even with her kneeling, her head was just as the level with his when she opened her mouth wide.

There wasn't anything in Crescentia's mouth but teeth that were too big and too perfect and a tongue that was too long. But there was something in her throat that shouldn't have been there, and her throat was really what Ranwick had wanted to see. It was a small control there. It was apparently electronic. It had wires. It boked. It had Crescentia under its control.

Well, was Crescentia robotic, to some extent at least? And was the opposite of robotic human, or was it chaotic? Ranwick loved Crescentia for her creativeness, but whose creature was a robot?

They came to a new spring at mid-morning. This spring was robust enough, it was strong enough, but it was also serene. There was a healing corona about it, a reminiscent and reassuring mistiness. Even the boisterous Crescentia was subdued.

"It is very deep," she said. "Do you want to go very deep down in the pool with me and stay there a very long time?"

"No, I will wait for the spring to declare herself, Crescentia."

"I could take you down with me whether you wanted to go or not."

"But you won't, Crescentia."

"I will go get the children then," she said. "Maybe the spring will want them."

"Have you children, Crescentia?" he asked, but he was paying attention to the spring and not to her.

"I don't know whose they will be," she said. "I will get some children somewhere and give them to the spring." She went away, up over the hill in an unexpected direction.

Ranwick waited in pleasant anticipation. He had never ceased to love any spring or pegged that he had ever loved, and certainly he still loved Crescentia. But a new love does take precedence.

"Where are you, pegged?" he asked. There was a stirring deep in the water to show that she heard. So he talked to her.

"You are reassuring, pegged," he said, "and it won't matter if you do have a contrived throat. Of course things have to be kept in repair. There is strategic mountain repair within the last five thousand years. There is strategic water repair within the last

five days. I remember what a street preacher said once about water that had got out of repair. Do you want to hear it?"

The stirring in the deep water of the spring's pool indicated that of course the pegged wanted to hear anything that Ranwick might tell her.

"The preacher said that the Biblical Flood was a returning of water to its chaotic state. The man said that during the flood there was not more water than always (which would be impossible, for where would it come from?), but it was a case of the ordered water breaking its bonds when the fountains of the deep burst forth and the flood-gates of the heavens were opened. There was a horrible unstructuring of the water then. Should such an unstructuring happen again today, then such a flood would also happen again today. That's what the street preacher said. Do you agree?"

There was a deep stirring in the pool. It was the pegged saying that she partly agreed.

"Yesterday I found two new springs," Ranwick said. "They were 'Mad Giantess Spring' and 'Usurpation Spring'. The pegged at Usurpation Spring would not come up for fear of the mad giantess, but I love her as well as if I had known her. Are you also afraid of the mad giantess?"

The deep stirring in the pool indicated that the pegged was somewhat cautious of the mad giantess, and that she would hide down there a while yet.

Cliveden Houseghost, the husband of the mad giantess, came up the slope to Ranwick.

"You wrote a note last night that most of the springs have iron pipes in their throats," Cliveden said, "so, of course, such springs are artificial. The normal way would be for the water to come out of the ground in seeps that produce dangerous quagmires. So there is cementing and channeling of the springs to give an ordered and restricted flow. And contrived throats are provided, of iron, of bronze, of glazed stone. It shouldn't be a shock that most of the beauty of a spring is artificially produced; by whom, I don't know."

"What is in Crescentia's own throat?" Ranwick asked.

"It's a psycho-monitor, a sort of electronic conscience. Crescentia has no other sort of conscience. It is put in her throat because her emotions curiously center there."

"You said last night that you supposed that loving a beautiful spring that had been tampered with was like loving a beautiful woman who turned out to be a robot. Is she?"

"Not literally. But her personality and her derangement do make her into a

sort of robot. Where is she? I thought she was with you."

"She said something about going to get some children, and she went."

"Oh, that's trouble," Cliveden said. "She is supposed to leave children completely alone. There's a court order to that effect. I will have to find her at once."

"Here she is," Ranwick said. Crescentia came to them from over the hill. She seemed somewhat disturbed, somewhat angry.

"They watch them too closely," she said. "I couldn't get hold of any children at all. They made a rotten big fuss about me going into that little town to try to get some children. I think there's going to be some trouble."

"I know that there is," Cliveden Houseghost said. "Let us go back to the lodge, great child yourself, and deal as well as we can with them when they come."

"All right," Crescentia said. She caressed Ranwick judiciously. "I might not see you again," she said. She went towards the distant lodge with Cliveden.

"Will you come up now?" Ranwick asked the paged.

The deep water stirred to say "Not yet. We are not through with visitors yet."

"Is there really anything to this business of the whole world being a contrived sort of rock-garden?" Ranwick asked the spring-spirit.

There was a double stirring in the

deep water. These said "Yes, there is quite a bit to that business"; and they said "It's the thing about the world and about us that you've been loving all the time: don't stop loving it now."

Ranwick went and put his two arms deep into the gushing throat of the spring. He worked around there a while. He brought out a short and corroded length of four inch iron pipe that was grown over with moss and verdigris.

"It isn't old, it isn't old at all," he said. "It's modern commercial pipe. It isn't thirty years old. Oh, you are an artificial vixen! Are you not ashamed?"

The amused stirring of the deep water said that the paged was in no way ashamed.

In the distance, there were official looking cars at the lodge. People got out of them, and later people got into them again. After a while they drove away. After a longer while, Cliveden Houseghost returned to the spring. He was sad and shook.

"What is it, Cliveden?" Ranwick asked.

"Oh, they've taken Crescentia away again, to the mental house, to the funny house. It becomes harder and harder to get her out each time, and I can keep her for a shorter and shorter while. I have had her home only a week this time."

"What's there about her madness that they should come and take her?"

"Oh, she drowns children. She doesn't really mean anything by it. I don't believe. She believes that the springs want them. But the people in

the little towns become very skittish whenever she goes on a children hunt."

"But children are not all that she drowns, Cliveden?"

"No. Sometimes she drowns men too. She is so strong that she handles men like children. Once it was the case that many springs, being unchanneled and like quagmires, would drown men in the same strong-handed way. I figure that you, knowing springs and spring-pegeids so well, would be able to avoid such a death. But I wouldn't have prevented it, and I didn't prevent others. You didn't think you could love ten thousand springs and their pegeids and not find one that somebody else loved very passionately, did you? I am very jealous, Ranwick. I wish she'd done it. They find out about the children, but they don't find out about the men she drowns."

Well yes, it was true that Cliveden Houseghost was insane, even as his wife Crescentia was. But it might be that (like her again) Cliveden was harmless in all minor matters.

Cliveden Houseghost went away, down to his lodge, and defeat was in every line of him.

"We'll have no more visitors this day," Ranwick said. "Will you come up now?"

There was a greater stirring in the deep water. The paged came up out of the spring-pool. She was like none other even, and the spring was like no other. The latest love, the ten thousandth love, is always the strongest one. ★

BREAKDOWN

(Continued from page 14)

they ruled out love?

—Just certain kinds.

Like ours? What can be wrong with the way we feel? What—?

—Shush! It's not important as long as we have each other.

(And we luxuriate in the closeness of our bodies, the touching of flesh and hair and—)

Don't let them ever part us, my love. —It won't happen. It—

The baby feels more confident. No, it is not confidence this time. Something else, desperation, that motivates it. It knows thatttttttt

(In the control room, the technician suspects. His indicators give a clue Among the thousands of cartridges, among the thousands of little bodies, something is wrong. He begins searching.)

1A (No) 1B (No) 1C (No) 1D —(Yes)

We don't have much time, you know. They're coming to get us.

—You can sense that too?

I feel it in my head. Vibrations, John. Dear one, maybe, they will get to us afterall. Maybe—

—It can't happen, darling. We'll fight. We must fight

(Pause)

—Why don't you answer?

(Pause)

—Say something!

They have told us it is wrong.

—And you believe them now, is that what you're saying?

(Pause)

—What we've meant to one another? Is that wrong, my love? Is that—?

(Pause)

(The technician contacts his superior, finds out what he is to do. He knows already but he must get clearance. He turns to the control panel.)

The system is flawless. It does not fail. It is as perfect as Man can make it.

—Never?

Never.

—Better answer that signal.

Yes. (Pause)

—What's wrong?

No time. We must hurry.

It will not last long. They do not tolerate rebels. They want a perfect

society. Man evolving from the imperfections of the past to a greater perfection than even the various religions could imagine. (Strange that God enters my thoughts. Strange that a Being that doesn't exist should occur to me now.)

But how does the standard of perfection explain us? John and I do not fit. We are departures. Perhaps a letter will explain. Perhaps they will understand after they read it. I raise my pen and begin.

The baby grabs at the wires. It is an older child. It was not wired in until weeks after its birth. The parents were killed in an automobile crash. The baby was found in a ditch.

It takes the wires and begins pulling at them. There are tears in its eyes.

We have the answer. I know we do. We don't need a non-existent God. We can orchestrate our own perfection, that which society demands. Once a seven year old child leaves Central, he is what we have intended from the beginning.

—But what about the breakdown that must happen from time-to-time? Improbable.

—Then why are we hurrying?

(Pause. There is now no sound except the clicking of their shoes on the corridor floor. They enter the huge chamber. A technician greets them excitedly.)

And that is all I can tell them, John. If they read this, they'll either understand or they'll tear it up and laugh.

The baby pulls at the wires. Blood streams from open wounds. It beats at the air. The little cartridge rocks in its chamber, lurches off, hits the floor, shatters.

Look!

—The technician gestures in horror. The baby screams once . . . and dies.

—How did it happen?

I don't know. This tape somehow became electronically interposed with this other one.

—In other words, they "met." They lived lives that were nothing but electronic impulses within Central. Yes.

—Generated into an infant's body?

Yes, yes. It can happen.

—So where is the perfection?

We're doing the best we can.

The babies all are wired into Central. Most are only a few days old. The process ideally must begin within minutes after delivery. If a birth occurs too far away from a Central unit, allowances can be made but there is often trouble later. The treatment occasionally doesn't "take" as a result and—

The first tape was destroyed. And along with it the other one labelled Harold. ★

ODYSSEY

Novella

The Warlock had added, "Pranther read your mind. He'll be getting surface thoughts until we can break you loose."

The porters were small, lithe, cheerful men. They did better than Orolandes at teaching the magicians elementary climbing techniques. They showed neither subservience to the magicians' power, nor contempt for their clumsiness. To natives of Pnsstihl a magician was a fellow-professional.

Clubfoot was a careful climber, little hampered by his twisted foot. But they were all aging, even Mirandee of the smooth pale skin and the white hair. The first night they hurt everywhere. They couldn't eat. They moaned in their sleep. In the morning they were too tired and too stiff to move, until hunger and the smell of breakfast brought them groaning from their blankets.

It was good for Orolandes' self-confidence, to see those powerful beings so far out of their element. He became marginally less afraid of them. But he wondered if they would give up.

As the ascent grew steeper the packs grew lighter. Food was eaten. Heavy cloaks were taken from the pecks and worn. But the air grew lean, and Orolandes and the porters panted as they climbed.

Not so the magicians. With altitude they seemed to gain strength. Here above the frost line there were even times when the rich creamy fall of Mirandee's hair would darken momentarily, then grow white again.

It usually happened when they were passing one of the old fallen structures.

They had passed the first of these on the third day. No question about what it was. It was an altar, a broad slab of cut rock richly stained with old blood. "This was why the gods survived so long

here," the Warlock lectured them. "Sacrifice in return for miracles. But when the gods' power waned in the lands below the mountain, the miracles weren't always granted. The natives didn't know why, of course. Eventually they stopped sacrificing."

Higher structures were more cryptic, and not built by men. They passed a cluster of polished spheres of assorted sizes, fallen in a heap in a patch of snow. They glowed by their own light: four big spheres banded in orange and white, one with a broad ring around it; three much smaller, one mottled ochre and one mottled blue-and-white and one shining white; and two, the smallest, the yellow-white of old bone. Further on was a peaked circular structure sitting on the ground. It looked like a discarded roof.

Though Orolandes was still the master climber, this was evidently magicians' territory.

There was no firewood on the third night. It was not needed. After they made camp the magicians—tired but cheerful, no longer bothered by strained muscles—sang songs in a ring around a sizeable boulder, until the boulder caught fire. Another song brought a unicorn to be slaughtered and butchered by the porters. Orolandes could only admire the porters' aplomb. They roasted the meat and boiled water for herb tea on a burning rock, as if they had been doing it all their lives.

After dinner, as they were basking around the fire, Clubfoot said to Mirandee, "You know that I've admired you for a long time. Will you be my wife while our mission lasts?"

Orolandes was jolted. Never would he have asked a woman such a question except in privacy. But Clubfoot did not

expect to be turned down . . . and it showed in his face when Mirandee smiled and shook her head. "I gave up such things long ago," she said. "Being in love ruins my judgment. It takes my mind off what I'm doing, and I ruin spells. But I thank you."

On the morning of the fourth day they came on a flight of stairs leading up from the lip of a sheer cliff. Aided by climbing ropes, they crawled sideways along an icy slope to reach the stairs; broad slabs of unflawed marble that narrowed as they rose, but that rose out of sight into the clouds.

Placed on random steps were statues, human, half-human, not at all human. Orolandes tried to forget, and could not, a half-melted thing equipped with tentacles and broad clawed flippers and a single eye. But there was a hardwood statue of a handsome, smiling man that Orolandes found equally disturbing, and for no reason at all. Magic. Here where men could not live because they could not grow food, magic still lived.

There was snow and ice on either side of them, but no ice had formed on the marble. The stairway rose past strange things. Here was something shattered, a flowing shape that must have looked like a teardrop dripping upward before it broke at the base and toppled. There, a section seemed to have been bitten out of the mountain-side to leave a broad flat place. An arena, it was, where two sets of metal-and-leather armor stood facing each other in attack position, weapons raised, each piece of armor suspended in air. As the little party climbed past, the armor dropped in two heaps.

The Warlock stopped. "Orolandes. Climb down there and get one of those swords."

"I gave up swords," said Orolandes.

"Maybe you won't use it, but it's best

ODYSSEY

Novella

if you have it. Magic can't do everything. None of us has ever used a sword... except Wavyhill."

The skull laughed on his shoulder. "Much good it did me. Do it, Greek. It's a good idea."

Orolandes shucked his pack and clambered down and across the rocks. He chose the straight-bladed sword; it would fit his sheath. It felt natural in his hand, but it roused unpleasant memories. He did not try to interpret the worn carvings on the blade.

Now the stairway above was hidden by cloud, the banner of cloud that always streamed from the mountain's peak.

The Warlock dismissed the porters, paying them in gold. Orolandes pled what was left in the packs into one pack, and they went on, up into the cloud.

The cold became wet cold. Ice crystals blew around them. The magicians below were half-hidden. Orolandes climbed with one hand on the rock wall. The other side was emptiness.

The snow-fog thinned. They were climbing out of the cloud.

They emerged, and it was glorious. The cloudbank stretched away like a clean white landscape, under a brilliant sun and dark blue sky. The Warlock rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "We're here! Orolandes, let me get into that pack."

The others watched as he chose his tools. If the Warlock had told them what he was about, Orolandes hadn't heard it. He did not speculate. He waited to know what was expected of him.

The attitude came easily to him. He had risen through the ranks of the Greek army, he could follow orders. He had given orders, too, before Atlantis sank beneath him. Since then Orolandes had given over control of his own fate.

"Good," muttered the Warlock. He opened a wax-stoppered phial and poured dust into his hand and scattered it like seeds into the cloudscape. He sang words unfamiliar to Orolandes.

Mirandee and Clubfoot joined in, clear soprano and awkward bass, at chorus points that were not obvious. The song trailed off in harmony, and the Warlock scattered another handful of dust.

"All right. Better let me go first," he said. He stepped off the stairs into

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ODYSSEY

Novella

feathery emptiness.

He bounced gently. The cloud held him.

Clubfoot followed, in a ludicrous bouncing stride that sank him calves-deep into the fog. Mirandee walked out after him. They turned to look back.

Clubfoot started to choke. He sat down in the shifting white mist and belched with a laughter that threatened to strangle him. Mirandee fought it, then joined in a silvery giggle. There was the not-quite-sound of Wavyhill's chortling.

The laughter seemed to fade, and the world went dim and blurry. Orolandes felt his knees turn to water. His jaw was sagging. He had climbed up through this cloud. It was cold and wet and without substance. It would not hold a fatterer from falling, let alone a man.

The witch's silver laughter burned him like acid. For the lack of the Warlock's laughter, for the Warlock's exasperated frown, Orolandes was grateful. When the Warlock swept his arm in an impatient beckoning half-circle, Orolandes stepped out into space in a soldier's march.

His foot sank deep into what felt like feather bedding, and bounced. He was off balance at the second step, and the recoil threw him further off. He looked out frantically. His leg sank deep and recoiled and threw him high. He landed on his side and bounced.

Mirandee watched with her hands covering her mouth. Clubfoot's laugh was a choking whimper now.

Orolandes got up slowly, damp all over. He waded rather than walked toward the magicians.

"Good enough. We don't have a lot of time," said the Warlock. "Take a little practice—we all need that—then go back for the pack."

Cloudscapes

The layer of cloud stirred uneasily around them. It was not flat. There were knolls of billowing white that they had to circle round. It was like walking through a storehouse full of damp goose down. The cloud-stuff gave underfoot, and pulsed as the foot came forward.

Orolandes had found a stride that let him walk with the top-heavy pack, but it was hard on the legs. Half-exhausted and growing careless, he nearly walked into a hidden rift. He stared straight down through a feathery canyon at

small drifting patches of foam. A tiny plume of dust led his eye to a moving speck, a barely visible horse and rider.

He turned left along the rift, while his heart thundered irregularly in his ears.

Clubfoot looked back. Mount Vailhalla rose behind them, a mile or so higher than they'd climbed, blazing snow-white in the sunlight. "Far enough, I guess. Now, the crucial thing is to keep moving," he said, "because if the magic fails where we're standing it's all over. Luckily we don't have to do our own moving."

He helped Orolandes doff the pack. He rummaged through it and removed a pair of water-tumbled pebbles, a handful of clean snow, and a small pouch of grey powder. "Now, Kranthorpool, would you be so kind as to tell us where we're going?"

"No need to coerce me," said Wavyhill. "We go east and north. To the northernmost point of the Alps."

"And we've got food for four days. Well, I guess we're in a hurry." Clubfoot began to make magic.

The Warlock did not take part. He knew that Clubfoot was a past master at weather magic. Instead he watched Mirandee's hair

Yes, her youth had held well. She had the dear skin and unwrinkled brow of a serene thirty-year-old noblewoman. Her wealth of hair was now raven black, with a streak of pure white that ran from her brow all the way back. As she helped Clubfoot sing the choruses, the white band thickened and thinned and thickened.

The Warlock spoke low to Orolandes. "If you see her hair turn sheer white, run like hell. You're overloaded with that pack. Just get to safety and let me get the others out." The Greek nodded.

Now the clouds stirred about them. The fitful breeze increased slightly, but not enough to account for the way the mountain was receding. Now the clouds to either side churned, fading or thickening at the edges. Through a sudden rift they watched the farlands drift away.

"Down there they'll call this a hurricane. What they'll call us doesn't bear mentioning," Clubfoot chuckled. He walked back to where Orolandes was standing and settled himself in the luxurious softness of a cloud billow. In a lowered voice he said, "I've been wrestling with my conscience. May I tell

you a story?"

Orolandes said, "All right." He saw that the others were beyond earshot.

"I'm a plainsman," said Clubfoot. "My master was a lean old man a lot like the Warlock, but darker, of course. He taught half a dozen kids at a time, and of course he was the tribe's medicine man. One day when I was about twelve, old White Eagle took us on a hike up the only mountain anywhere around."

"He took us up the easy side. There were clouds streaming away from the top. White Eagle did some singing and dancing, and then he had us walk out on the cloud. I ran out ahead of the rest. It looked like so much fun."

"Fun," Orolandes said without expression.

"Well, yes. I'd never been on a cloud. How was a plains kid to know clouds aren't solid?"

"You mean you never... realized..." Orolandes started laughing.

Clubfoot was laughing too. "I'd seen clouds, but way up in the sky. They looked solid enough. I didn't know why White Eagle was doing all that howling and stamping."

"And the next time you went for a stroll on a cloud—"

"Oh, no. White Eagle explained that. But it must have been a fine way to get rid of slow learners."

Mirandee was saying, "Do you really think Pranthor can't follow us?"

"There's no way he can travel this fast on the ground," said the Warlock. "If he's in the clouds, we'll know it. Just as our weather pattern must be fairly obvious to him. Do you see any stable spots in this cloud canopy?"

"No... but there used to be other ways to fly."

The Warlock snorted. "Used to be, yes."

Mirandee seemed really worried. "I wonder if you aren't underestimating Pranthor. Warlock, I had occasion to visit the South Land Mass not long ago."

"Mending fences for me?"

"If you like. I thought he might be ready to forget healed wounds long cooled. He wasn't." She gestured nervously. "Never mind that. I saw power. There are roc chicks in that place, baby birds eight feet tall, that breed as chicks and never grow up. Pranthor's people raise them for the eggs and let children ride on their backs! I watched apprentice magicians duel for sport, with

adepts standing by to throw ward-spells. It was like stepping two hundred years into the past. I watched a castle shape itself out of solid rock—"

"And now all the castles are falling down, or so says Piranther. The mana can't be that high, not if the rocs don't breed nght. Piranther can't be as powerful as all of us put together."

"He's their leader. The most powerful of them all."

The Warlock settled his back against a soft billow of cloud. "This place is paradise for a lazy man Orolandes!" he called.

Orolandes and Clubfoot came chuckling about something. The swordsman let the Warlock put his hands on his head and mutter an ancient spell.

"That should break the link between you and Piranther. Now, Wavyhill, the time has come. Tell us about the last god."

Orolandes settled himself cross-legged. He felt no different . . . and he was never going to relax here, despite the infinity of featherbed. But he would not show it either.

The skull on the Warlock's shoulder said, "Tell you a story, hey? All right, why not? It all happened half a thousand years ago. The god's name was Roze, and his properties were love and madness. He had a female aspect, and her name was Kattee. Whether both aspects were saved I do not know. There's a lot I don't know. But Roze-Kattee is said to be dormant, not dead."

"Said by whom?" Mirandee asked.

"By the Northways. Roze-Kattee wasn't their god, he was their enemy. He was the Frost Giants' god. The Northway people conquered the Frost Giants in wars that lasted nearly a century.

"My master, in the days when I had a master, was interested in the Northway-Frost Giant wars. He couldn't see how the Northway gods could beat the Frost Giant gods on their own home ground. The Frost Giants are human enough, and bright enough. They make good slaves, but they would have made better fighters; they stand six and seven feet tall. And they wouldn't have lost control of their gods."

"He never learned what happened to the Frost Giants, because he never learned about mana depletion. That was left to you, Warlock, O Bearer of Bad Tidings."

The Warlock nodded slowly. "It seems obvious enough. The Northways had no gods. Their gods were destroyed when they were driven out of the Fertile Crescent. So they fought with swords, and the Frost Giants fought with magic, and over three generations they used up the mana. After which the Northways made them slaves. It's a common enough story."

"The uncommon part," said Wavyhill, "was their treatment of Roze-Kattee. They took it upon themselves to protect their god, instead of the other way around. I could like them for that. When Roze-Kattee had lost all his power, when he could barely move, they got him to a place of safety. There he remains dormant to this day, or so say the Frost Giants. But none of them will admit to knowing where that place is."

Diffidently Clubfoot suggested, "Torture?"

"Oh, the Northways probably tortured some of their Frost Giant slaves. Maybe they got the wrong ones. Maybe the priests who brought Roze-Kattee to his

resting place migrated afterward, or killed themselves. But maybe the Northways didn't try too hard. Why should they? Roze-Kattee had not saved the Frost Giants. The poor time-weakened thing might be barely capable of killing any Northway who found him."

The setting sun was still brilliant, under a higher cloud canopy that thickened as night drew near. Mount Valhalla was a mere point of splendor far to the southeast. The clouds were soft against Orolandes' back. He was relaxing in spite of himself. It was all so unreal. Could one die in a dream?

The Warlock asked, "Can you find Roze-Kattee?"

"Maybe. The tradition speaks of a 'god within a god'. With that clue I think I've worked it out. We have to stretch the definition a little. If I'm right, the Northways had plenty of reason not to go looking for Roze-Kattee."

"And we don't?"

"Time has passed. We know more than those barbarians did. We have more to gain. And less to lose," said

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ODYSSEY

Novella

Wavyhill

The upper cloud layer covered the stars. It had not been cold during the day, when sunlight was bouncing back at them from all of the reflecting white landscape; but it was cold now. Orolandes lay in total darkness and utter silence, afraid to move, hoping that a rift would not form where he was lying. When the silence had become unbearable he said, "I wish I could see your hair."

Mirandee was nearby. She said, "Why, swordsman? Is that a compliment?" as if she didn't much care for it.

"If your hair turns white, we're about to fail."

After a time she said, "Magicians and swordsmen go together like foxes and rabbits. What are you doing among us?"

"Ask Wavyhill."

"But you didn't have to come."

"I did a terrible thing. I don't want to talk about it."

She laughed, invisible silver. "Tell me now or I'll read your mind. Wavyhill said you had no defenses."

Out of the need to confess, out of his sure knowledge that the words would block his throat, rendering him mute, as he had been mute among the fishermen, out of some obscure need to be punished... Orolandes said, "Go ahead, Pranthier did."

There was a long dark silence. Then the witch woman said, "Oh, Orolandes!" in a voice filled with tears.

"I'm sorry."

"I know. I can see it. All charged up with the need to prove you were a man. Running into death waving that big damned sword. Crawling to kill the priests because they were killing your friends."

"Yes."

"I shouldn't have looked. That's usually the way of it. I find out I shouldn't have looked."

"I can't do anything about the people that drowned. Maybe I can help put the magic back in the world. What does Wavyhill have in mind for me? Do you know?"

"No. His mind's locked tight. I trust the Warlock, though. He'll control Wavyhill. Go so sleep, swordsman."

Little chance of that, Orolandes thought. He looked toward where her voice had been. Was there a pale spot in the enveloping darkness? Long hair turning white?

"There's circulation in the clouds

around and beneath us. The mana circulates. We won't fall. Go to sleep," she said.

Something touched his sword arm and he woke and rolled hard to the left and came up on his feet, sword in hand. It was black as the inside of a mole's belly. The footing was unfamiliar, treacherous. A woman's voice cried, "Don't!"

And he remembered.

"Mirandee? Did you wake me up?"

"You were having nightmares."

"Sorry. Was I screaming or something?"

"No. Just the nightmares. I wish I'd stayed out of your mind. I've never met anyone so unhappy."

"Can you blame me?" He sank down in unseen softness.

"Yes. You've killed a dozen men at least with your sword. Why be so upset about Atlantis? You killed more people, but it's the same thing, isn't it?"

"When I kill a man with a sword, it's because he's a soldier. He's trying to kill me."

"If you weren't on his territory—"

"Then he'd be on mine! If Greece didn't have an experienced army she'd be meat for the first wolf that came at the head of an experienced army. Magic didn't help the Frost Giants, and that was a long time ago. These days magic doesn't even slow down an army. So everyone needs armies."

"Wars of magic aren't much prettier. Get the Warlock to tell you about his duel with Wavyhill. Or get Wavyhill to tell you."

"All right." Orolandes was sliding back into sleep. But the nightmare waited for him.

The touch of her hand on his arm startled him. "You're still unhappy."

"I can't do anything about it."

"I can." Her hand moved up into his sleeve, caressingly.

He laughed. "Does the fox bed with the rabbit?"

"We are two human beings. How long has it been since you were with a woman?"

"A long time. I—" He hadn't wanted one. He would have thought, she is sharing love, all unknowing, with a man who murdered thousands. When the women of the fishing village came, he had turned them away without speaking, as if his voice alone would tell them what he was.

This Mirandee, he had never seen her as a woman. A figure of power she had been, a dangerous being who tolerated him, whose presence was necessary to his goal. Her mockery had hurt—

"Well, but you were so frightened! You should have seen yourself. I was frightened myself," she confessed. "I've never been on a cloud before."

Her hand felt good on his arm. It was so cold and so lonely here. He found her face with his fingers. He traced the contours gently; he stroked her temples, and scratched her behind the ears, as he would with a Greek woman. They lay against each other now, but he felt only a double thickness of fur, and the cold of a mountain night on his face... and then her cheek against his, barely warmer.

This was better than going back to the nightmare. And she knew, he was hiding nothing from her. She knew, yet she was willing to touch him. He was grateful.

He was half asleep when the lust rose up in him, burning. She sensed it. They began opening each other's robes, leaving them on to protect their backs against the cold. Even now his urgency was tempered by that uncharacteristic gentleness. He wanted to make her feel good.

He succeeded. In climax she was wildcat and python combined: her arms and legs clasped him hard, pulling him into her.

They lay against each other with their robes overlapping. Orolandes was pleased and proud.

A thought crossed his mind... and she laughed softly in his ear. "No, I did not falsify my pleasure to give you confidence. And no, you have not become a lover fit for a queen's harem. Your mind is in mine. I feel what you feel. It's... exciting."

Ruefully, but not very, he said, "What joy you would have had of another mind reader!"

She laughed more loudly. "If I were ready to die, yes, that would be a fine way to leave the world!"

"Oh."

"You've found your voice. When we shared love you didn't speak at all."

His mind flashed back to the fishing village.

"Never mind," she said quickly. "Shall we sleep like this?"

He nestled against her and slept without dreams.

The Warlock woke blinking in the sudden dawn. He was hungry. His face was sharply cold where it poked through the robes. The rest of him was warm and comfortable in the robes and the cloud-stuff.

Clubfoot was on his back, sprawled out like a starfish in the clouds, looking indecently comfortable. Wayhill's skull was where the Warlock had mounted it last night, on a billowing knoll of cloud.

The Warlock called up to Wayhill. "Anything?"

"Nothing attacked. The mana level stayed high. It's still high; all my senses, such as they are, are razor sharp. I think I heard something that wasn't just the wind, around midnight. I couldn't tell what. It might have been wings, big wings."

"Something big enough to carry Piranther?"

"I don't know. That's the trouble; you think some beast has gone mythical, and then you get into a place of high magic and it swoops down at you. There might be all kinds of survivals, here in the sky... Warlock, had you thought of doing our experiments here?"

"No raw materials. No food sources either." The Warlock grinned. "That might not bother you, but you can't work alone."

"Right. Someone has to make the gestures."

During the night much of the cloudscape had melted away. The mass they still occupied was pushing upward in the center. For some hours it must have blocked Wayhill's view forward.

Wayhill asked, "Are you sure we've lost Piranther?"

"I... no."

"All right. Neither am I."

"I don't see how he could be following us. But that's no guarantee at all. Piranther and his people have hed most of fifty years to explore the South Land Mass. What could he have found in the way of telismans?"

"Another Fistfall?"

"Or more than one. He could be pacing us on dragonback." The sky burned deep blue, nearly cloudless, but the Warlock said, "Behind that one cloud, maybe, watching us. I was overconfident."

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TO BEGIN

"OPPOSITE OF NO"

ODYSSEY

Novella

"Did you have a choice? Relax. This is a fun way to travel. By the way, there has been another development. TipToe around this knob of cloud and you'll see."

TipToe? The clumsiest giant would not make an audible footfall here. The Warlock waded around, and saw Mirandee and Orolandes wrapped in each other's arms in the cloud-shadow.

Perhaps he lied, to Wavyhill, or to himself. "Good. I was afraid they wouldn't get along."

The air mass rushed steadily north and west. The center continued to push upward. By noon they were high on the slope of a billowing mountain, a storm thunderhead.

Clubfoot trekked up to the peak. "It's steeper on the forward face," he reported when he came back. "I don't like the footing much, but the view is terrific. Wavyhill, lets set you up there as lookout"

"Lookout and figurehead. Why not?"

In the end they stayed up there, Clubfoot and Wavyhill and the Warlock, Orolandes and Mirandee declined to join them.

It was a heady view. The crackle of lightning sounded constantly from underneath them. Flights of birds passed far away, flying south. Once an eagle came screaming down to challenge their invasion of its territory. That was worrying. They had nothing to throw at the bird, and any magic might melt the cloud beneath them. Fortunately the eagle saw the size of them and reconsidered.

Wavyhill said, "We might be the last human beings ever to see this, for thousands of years, maybe forever."

They were passing over an endless forest. To their right the cloud-shadow brushed the treetops, on the left a behemoth waded through crackling tree trunks, stopped, looked up at them with intelligent eyes. The cloudscape sloped steeply down from here, dazzling white, with shadowed valleys and rifts in it.

"We couldn't ask for a better vantage point," said the Warlock. "Or more comfortable seating." And he glanced at Clubfoot. "What's wrong with you? You look like your last friend just died."

"Orolandes is a fine young man," Clubfoot stated. "He is brave and loyal,

and unlike many swordsmen, he has a conscience. Bearing all that in mind, would you tell me what the hell Mirandee sees in that bloody-handed mundane?"

"You could ask Mirandee."

"I'd rather not."

"Would it help if I told you why Mirandee turned down your offer? I think she was being polite. To me. We shared a bed once. She didn't want to remind me of what I've lost."

"All right. That was nice of her. But why—"

"Nobody can tell you." The Warlock looked at him. "I'd have thought you were too old for this kind of acidic jealousy."

"So would I," said Clubfoot.

At sunset the winds around the peak turned chilly. The two magicians climbed down the back slope of the thunderhead. The cloud surface was uneasy, in constant slow-flowing motion. They ate their cold rations and went to sleep.

But Wavyhill remained on the peak, on duty.

The third day was very like the second. Orolandes and Mirandee kept their own company, finding privacy in one of the shadowed valleys well aft of the thunderhead peak. Clubfoot and the Warlock loitered on the peak.

Clubfoot seemed to have come to terms with himself. He had been stiffly polite to Mirandee at breakfast, but here he could relax. "This is the way to travel. We should have gone to Pristhill this way, Warlock."

The Warlock chuckled. "That would have been nice, wouldn't it? We couldn't. No mountains to climb near Warlock's Cave. And the only place to get off would have been high on Valhalla, without porters. Come to that, we'll have a problem when we get where we're going."

Wavyhill said, "Don't worry. We're headed for a mountain. At this speed we'll get there late tomorrow. It's true we'll have to do some climbing."

Clubfoot shifted in the cloud-stuff. "So we'll rest up for it."

Wavyhill studied him. "Comfortable, isn't it? You complacent troll, you. You've all been sleeping like the dead. And Mirandee and the swordsman, I guess they earned it, making like mad minks all day. I wish I could sleep!"

Clubfoot's anger left him as suddenly as it had come. "We could block your

senses.

"It's not the same. It's not the same as sleeping, or blinking, or—or crying. I want eyelids."

"Let's try something," said Clubfoot.

They bed a line to his jawbone, for a marker, and pushed Wavyhill a foot deep into cloud. They pulled him up a minute later, and then half an hour later. He said he was comfortable. It was not like sleeping, Wavyhill said, but it was like resting with his eyes closed.

They left him there until sunset.

In a shadowed valley, enclosed in cottony wisps of fog that resisted motion, Orolandes lay with his cheek on Mirandee's belly. The sunlight filtered through the cloud walls to bathe them in pearly light.

"Love and madness," he mused.

"They go together, don't they?"

"You feel your sanity returning?"

"Why, no, not at all."

"Good." She chuckled. The flat abdominal muscles jumped pleasantly under his ear.

"I wonder," he said. "What makes this Roze-Kattee a god of love and madness? The gods came before men, didn't they? Did gods fall in love? and go mad?"

Troubled, she shifted position. "Good question. We'll have to know the answers before we do anything drastic. I'd guess that one day an anonymous god looked around itself and decided it would die without worship. There were men around. What did they need that Roze-Kattee could supply? Some gods were more versatile than others. Roze-Kattee probably wasn't."

"What would a god of love and madness do?"

"Oh... bestow madness on enemies. Ward it from friends. Love? Hmm."

"The same thing? Make the Frost Giants' enemies love them?"

"Why not? And arrange good political alliances by fiddling with the emotions of the king or queen. Priests learn to be practical, if their gods don't."

"Do you think this god will fight us?"

She shifted again. "It needs us as much as we need it. We'll know better when we see this dormant god." Her long fingernails tickled his chest hairs. "Don't think about it now. Think about sharing love on a cloud. Few mundanes have that chance."

"It does take practice."

"We've had practice."

"I'm the only fighter among you. Magicians wouldn't break their backs to protect a swordman."

"But I would."

In the night something woke the Warlock. He stirred in seductive comfort while his eyes searched the vivid starscape. Nothing, only stars... He was dropping off to sleep when it came again: a surging beneath him, like a cloud-muffled bump.

Clubfoot's sleepy voice said, "What?"

"Don't know."

There was a more emphatic bump.

Orolandes felt it too: a surging beneath him. He stirred and felt momentary panic.

"Cloud. You're on a cloud," Mirandee said reassuringly. Her eyes were inches away; her breath tickled his growing beard.

"All right. But what was that—"

The cloud surged again.

Orolandes ran his fingers through her hair—it was raven black by starlight—rolled away and stood up. The others would be around the side of the puffy thunderhead peak. He walked that way, aware that Mirandee was following him.

Clubfoot and the Warlock were on their feet. Clubfoot called, "Did you see anything?"

"No, but I felt—"

Beyond the two sorcerers, beyond the edge of the cloudscape, a shadow rose up and blotched the stars. Starlight reflected faintly from huge wide-set eyes.

Mirandee was behind him, her hand on his hip.

"Don't make magic," the Warlock yelled. "Not yet. It's a roc."

The great bird was treading air, holding itself in position with an occasional flap of its wings. It cocked first one eye, then the other, to study the people on the cloud. Then it spoke to them in a basso profundo thunderclap.

"CAW!"

"Caw yourself!" Orolandes snarled, and he stamped toward it. His sword was longer than the bird's beak, he thought. It would reach an eye. This would be a wild way to die. But Mirandee would be safe, if he could put out an eye.

"CAW!" bellowed the bird. Its wings rose and snapped down.

A hurricane gust threw Orolandes backward. He curled protectively around the sword blade, somersaulted twice and came up crouched. Another blast beat straight down on his head and shoulders.

The bird was overhead, stooping down on Mirandee.

Orolandes tried to run toward her. The cloud-stuff tangled his feet, slowing him.

Mirandee shouted something complex in nonsense syllables.

Soft blue radiance jumped between her outspread arms and the bird's descending beak. Her hair flashed white, and she dropped.

Orolandes howled.

The bird fluttered ineffectually and fell into the cloudscape in a disorganized tangle.

Orolandes attacked. His blade's edge buried itself in feathers. He set his feet, yelled and slashed again at the neck. He cut only feathers.

The bird's wings stirred feebly. It lifted its head with great effort, said, "CAW?" and died.

Mirandee cried, "Help!"

Her hair was a black cloud spilled across white. She was buried to the armpits. "I stole its power. Gods, I feel all charged up! Lucky I remembered that vampire spell or I'd be trying to fly myself. Clubfoot, can you get me out of here?" She was babbling in the shock of her brush with death.

Orolandes went to her, treading carefully, knee-deep in viscous cloud. He took her by the elbows and pulled her out of the pit and set her down.

"Oh! Thank you. That vampire spell, old Sarter taught it to me a hundred years ago, and I just knew I'd never use it. I thought I'd forgotten it. It wouldn't even work any more, most places. Oh, Landes, I was so scared."

Clubfoot said, "You sucked that bird dry, all right. Look."

The bird was deep in the cloud and sinking deeper. As they watched it vanished under the surface.

"We can't stay here," said Clubfoot. "We don't want anyone walking into that patch. It wouldn't hold a feather, and you can't tell it from the rest of the cloud."

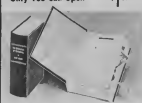
They moved far around to the steeper northern face of the traveling storm.

In the morning the Alps reared their tremendous heads ahead of them.

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ODYSSEY

Novella

In the Cavern

The cloudscape was all around them again, a shifting white sea swirling around the dark mountain and splashing up its slope. The others stayed flat on their bellies while Clubfoot worked his weather magic. His spells were good; he steered their own spell-congealed raft straight for the mountain, the last in the range, that Wavyhill had pointed out. But this was not at all like docking a ship.

As they neared the steep rock slope, the clouds surged backward. Clubfoot was flung face down. The spell-hardened cloud deformed like taffy, while the magicians braced themselves against deceleration.

Clubfoot stayed prone. "Climb up," he told them. "There's no going down till I can dissolve the cloud. Up toward that ledge as best we can. It'll hold us all, I think. Ready?"

The mountain's rock face plowed toward them. Into them. For seconds they danced frantically on rock and cloud, as the cloud slid up along the hard surface. Then they were climbing above the mist, Orolandes in the lead and finding handholds for the rest. Mountains are hard. They do not change shape.

There were patches of snow and hard ice to be avoided. From time to time he looked down to check the progress of his charges. He climbed coolly, competently... until once the clouds parted and he saw a dizzying drop of near-vertical slope. By now their congealed patch would be far away. If they fell now they would strike nothing but mist... at first.

Orolandes looked down no more until he had reached the ledge.

His pack was tight now, the food nearly gone. He shucked it and turned to see how the others were making out. Mirandee was in the lead, Wavyhill's skull and the Warlock seemed to be quarreling. Clubfoot was trailing, having trouble.

He moored his line to a knob of rock and threw the coils downslope. The magicians came up the line. They sat on the ledge, panting out gusts of cold stream.

The Warlock found his voice. "One more word 'out of you... and you can... walk down.'"

"It's still true," said the skull on his

shoulder. "You almost killed us back there."

The Warlock got to his feet. "Can you see anything? I can't."

There were twin peaks upslope from them, to the south. Northward the bare rock sloped down into an unbroken white sea.

"Clubfoot, can you get rid of the cloud cover?"

The magicians assembled on the ledge to sing chorus to Clubfoot's weather magic. Presently the mountain was laid bare.

"Look north," said Wavyhill. "Do you see where the slope is easiest, that smooth ridge with a drop on both sides? Rejoice. That's our path."

For most of the way it was easy going, a mile and a half of downhill stroll over smooth rock. The slope dipped more drastically there at the end, then ended in a rounded lip of rock. Orolandes motioned the others back. He stood at the edge of the drop, looking around, taking his time.

From the lip it was a clear drop, thirty feet to flat dirt.

Or the drop could be made in two stages, by way of what looked to be a congealed stream of lava. Its surface was pitted. It was twenty-odd feet wide and twenty feet high, and it ran under the lip of rock they were standing on. Ten feet down... but the lava tongue itself was rounded to a vertical slope all along its length, and that was further than he could see. It ran almost straight into the broken horizon.

"It'll be easier just to moor the line and climb down here," he told them. He showed them how to slide with the line around one ankle and clutched between the feet. He slid down first, then stood ready to break a magician's fall. They had less trouble than he'd expected. He caught Mirandee anyway, for pleasure.

They stood before the mouth of an enormous cavern.

"In there," Wavyhill whispered. "I was right. I wasn't sure until now."

Orolandes drew his sword. "Stay behind me," he told them, and moved forward.

Wavyhill laughed. "Do you have any idea what to expect?"

Orolandes boosted himself to the top of a chest-high buttress of stone. He turned back to host the others up. "Tell

me," he said.

Wavyhill didn't answer.

Orolandes pulled Mirandee up. She clung to him a moment and whispered into his ear, "Don't push him." He nodded.

He lifted the Warlock, the old magician was light despite his thick robes, and the skull was unpleasantly close for a moment. Then Clubfoot, who came up in a surge of energy.

"Don't go any further," said the skull. They looked into the cavern. It widened even further beyond the opening. In the darkness they could see vertical bars, prize-winning stalactites and stalagmites. The cavity was not symmetrical, and the twenty-foot-high river of lava ran into it.

"It's big," said Orolandes. "Do you know what this dormant god looks like? How big it is?"

"Don't go any further. I meant it," said Wavyhill.

The Warlock seemed amused. "Why not?"

"I have to make a decision."

"You've already made it."

The decorated skull snapped, "Has it occurred to you that I'm still the only one among us who knows what's going on? And that you and Clubfoot are the ones who brought a werewolf to tear the meat from my bones?"

"You're also the only one who knows why Orolandes is here. I don't know that. But I know you made your decision then."

Orolandes waited. In a split second his sword could split that skull, and without scratching the Warlock's shoulder.

Mirandee's tones were persuasive. "The biggest project ever conceived. The landing of the Moon. How can you not be a part of it?"

But Clubfoot was amused. "Could you possibly be angling for an apology?"

That did it. Wavyhill laughed. "You son of a troll. If I could kill you this instant you wouldn't apologize. All right, Greek. Put down the sword and go in and find the dormant god."

"Put down the sword?"

"I said that, yes."

It was dark in there. Menacing. The sword's weight felt comfortably normal in his hand.

"Leave it here. Otherwise it'll kill you. Snap out of it, Greek! This is your big

moment!"

Orolandes didn't like Wavyhill's obscene grin; but he too had made his decision long since. He set the sword on a boulder. He turned and walked into the darkness.

Stalagmites stood thicker and taller than he was. He had to duck the points of the longer stalagmites at first, but then the cavern's roof became too high for that.

Wavyhill's echoless voice followed him. "I don't know the size or shape of what you're looking for. You'll find it on the other side of that stream of smooth rock, probably far back."

He turned and called, "All right."

Motion exploded behind him. Things swatted his head from two directions. Orolandes threw himself flat and rolled over clutching for his sword. Things screamed all around him, their voices excruciatingly high-pitched.

They wheeled away from him, screaming, fluttering, dark shapes swarming toward the roof. Bats. Orolandes got up and moved on.

The lava flow ran along the side of the cavern. It ran the full length, back into a deeper blackness where the roof descended. Orolandes' hands found smooth rock marred with potholes. Strange to find potholes here where there was no rain. And in the sides, too.

Strange but convenient. He climbed the potholes, up the rounded side of the rock. Stalactites hung low over the top.

Between the other side and the cavern's wall was a three-foot gap. Orolandes walked toward the back, ducking stalactites, looking into the gap.

The deeper blackness at the back could it be another cavern? He might have to search that too. Should have brought a torch. But there was a shadow far back along the gap, a big shadow. If that was the god, he'd never move it. Even if it wanted to be moved. Even if it didn't fight back.

Wavyhill's shout came jarringly. "Orolandes! Come back! Come back now!"

"What for?" Orolandes' own shout echoed around him.

"Now! Obey me!"

He didn't trust Wavyhill worth a troll's curse, but he trusted the panic and anger in that command. He dropped

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ODYSSEY

Novella

lightly from the lava flow, caught himself in a controlled roll, and jogged toward the entrance.

The entrance flamed with daylight. Mirandee and Clubfoot stood seemingly in conversation. The Warlock leaned against a smooth rock wall. It was hardly a scene of panic.

Orolandes called, "What's the trouble?"

He knew that when his muscles locked, he teetered on a rigid forward leg, then toppled on his right side in running position. He tried to cry out, but his voice was locked too.

Mirandee, Clubfoot, the Warlock—they all looked casual enough, but they didn't move, they didn't speak, they didn't blink.

The sword was on the boulder where he had left it, a tantalizing arm's reach away.

The skull on the Warlock's shoulder said, "I'm sorry. It was everybody's mistake." He raised his voice, "Pranther! Where are you?"

A voice answered, "I'm above you." Pranther floated like an autumn leaf into the bright entrance.

Even in this northern cold, he went naked. His bright eyes searched for motion, for any sign that his spell of paralysis had failed. Nobody moved.

Pranther relaxed his grip on the leather bag at his throat. He walked nonchalantly around the Warlock, inspecting him, then turned his attention to the skull.

"Kranthikorpool, speak to me. Did you find the dormant god?"

"I'll let you guess." But Wavyhill's voice was strident.

Pranther slit the straps that held Wavyhill to the Warlock's shoulder. He lifted the skull down and looked at it, his fingers avoiding the gnashing jaws. "I could smash you," he said. "Or I could take away your senses and bury you here. Who would ever find you?"

Wavyhill said, "I think the Tiller priests must have put it behind that long rounded wall of rock. Far back."

"Thank you. Why did you want the swordsmen? You could have gotten it for yourselves."

"It's almost bound to be too heavy. Too heavy for you, too, Pranther, or for any one man. Can we deal on that basis?"

Pranther looked thoughtfully into the cavern. "But with the mana inherent in

it, you could float it out. Why—?"

"Curse it, we can't afford the loss! We need all the mana we can get. Don't you understand, this is the biggest thing anyone ever dreamed of!"

Pranther laughed. "Your big and foolish project. Your one solution to all the world's problems. Never trust such solutions, Kranthikorpool. I will take the dormant god back to the South Land Mass for our own use. It will serve our needs for some time to come." He set the skull down facing him. "I can leave it dormant for now. I do not need its mana. I have these."

Orolandes tried to make out what Pranther was holding. He saw intricate flashes of colored fire against the dark pink of Pranther's palm.

"Black opals. See how beautiful they are. Sense their power. There are more black opals in the South Land Mass than in all the rest of the world," said Pranther. "Well, let us see your dormant god." And he walked into the cavern, stepping delicately across Orolandes.

Orolandes lay frozen in a frozen world. Behind him Pranther's footsteps were casually erratic, growing faint and blurred with echoes.

Wavyhill spoke low. "I hope you're not dead. If you're all dead, then I'm in serious trouble."

The skull chuckled softly. "He's deep in the cavern now. Warlock, if you can hear me, I claim a vengeance foregone. You would have walked in as Pranther did."

The rock softened under Orolandes' rigid elbow. The light grew pink; or was the rock itself changing color?

The roof of the entrance descended. Behind Orolandes came Pranther's echoing scream. Wavyhill laughed shrilly, madly. A warm wet wind blew against Orolandes' back. It stank like the breath of a thousand wolves. Pranther's scream ended as if muffled.

The roof above him had dropped low enough to touch the Warlock's head.

Wavyhill ended his cackling. "Well? Am I right? Did I have your lives in my grasp? Isn't it a marvelous hiding place for the last god? Greek, you probably still don't understand. Have you heard of the World-Worm, the snake that circles the world and swallows its own

tail? The Alps and the Andes and the Rocky Mountains all form a part of its body. And you lie within its mouth."

Orolandes said, "Uhh!"

"Oh, hol! You're alive, are you? That paralysis won't last. I could free you now, if I could make the gestures. I don't think Pranther did anything fancy, he just bulled, through our ward-spells with the power in his black opals."

"Marvelous, isn't it? The World-Worm is a strange beast. Of course it couldn't possibly live by eating its own flesh. The tail used to have flanges of bone behind those huge pores. It sweeps up all kinds of things, turf, birds' nests, the dens of animals that lair in the pores, even full grown trees growing in the dirt the flanges sweep up. It grows very slowly this tail. And of course anything that wanders into the mouth gets eaten. I should be talking in the past tense, really," said the skull. "The fins are all weathered away. The World-Worm is like all magical forms of life; it turns to stone when the mana runs low. Like dragon bones. Like that statue in front of the Pristhil gates. What fooled Pranther was the tail. Running back into the mouth like that, it changes the shape so the cavern isn't mouth-shaped any more."

Teeth, thought Orolandes. I was jogging through a forest of spike teeth. He said, "Uhh!" The call of his leg kicked suddenly, painfully.

The roof of the cavern was rising... and changing in color, greying to the look of stone.

"Can talk," Clubfoot said. "Can't move yet. Anyone?"

The Warlock grunted. "Spell should wear off soon."

"Got us with those black opals," said Clubfoot. "We could not know. Wavyhill. Why here?"

"Why, it's obvious! Look: nobody who knows what this place is would come here. The World-Worm must have been nearly dead for centuries, but who'd risk it? If a mundane wandered in here all unknowing, nothing would happen. But if a magician came here looking for the dormant god—" Wavyhill chuckled. "There's mana in magic. The power of their spells hovers around magicians. Put a mana source in the World-Worm's mouth and what happens?"

"Poor Pranther," said Mirandee. "It wakes up for a snack," Clubfoot said callously.

"I think it would have done that even without the opals. Any time a magician comes calling . . . or a swordsman carrying a sword stolen from a place where gods once lived. In the meantime, whatever *mane* is still with the World-Worm is there to keep the dormant god alive. If our luck holds."

Clubfoot had called up a pair of hares: an old and simple magic, still potent almost everywhere. He had started a fire and cleaned the hares and was now roasting them. In his stiff back there was a rejection of the quarrel now going on in the cavern entrance.

"I won't let him go," Mirandee said. She sat with her back to them, her legs dangling over the stone buttress . . . over what must be the World-Worm's lower lip.

Orolandes came up behind Mirandee. He moved stiffly. They were all sore from the cramps that had followed their paralysis. He put his hands on her shoulders, ignored their angry shrug. "It is what we came for."

"Idiot! It's eaten a powerful magician and his black opals. It may not sleep again for years! Wavvhill, tell him! It eats things that wander into its mouth!"

"It may have gone dormant again," the skull said comfortably. "It was mana-starved for generations. It's a big beast; it needs nourishment."

"Father of trolls?" she spat.

"Retired."

"Mountain goat," the Warlock said without turning. He stood at the corner of the cavern's mouth, a little apart.

He was ignored. The skull on the rock said, "Listen, girl. I gave up my vengeance against these, my murderers. I am willing to ask a swordsman to the same high purpose."

The Warlock began singing to himself.

"Well, Landee? You heard him. You can't throw away your life after that. What about me?" Mirandee demanded.

Floating bodies, myriads of bodies, shoals of bloated human bodies turned in the waves, bumping gently against each other and against the wooden raft on which Orolandes lay dying of thirst beside the decaying body of a centaur girl. Did they thirst for vengeance? They had the right . . . and if Orolandes

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ODYSSEY

Novella

walked out of the cavern alive, there were lives still to be saved. There were centaurs and satyr tribes in Greece. He said, "I have to."

"If you die, I'll die!"
He was startled. "You'll die? Because you read my mind?"

"Yes!"
Wayhill said, "She's lying. Think it through. Panther read your mind too. Would he have taken that risk?"

Orolandes looked at her. Her eyes did not drop. "I mean it. I won't live without you."

A clattering of hooves startled them. They turned as a mountain goat bounded up on the World-Worm's lip and stood gazing up at the Warlock.

"Any of you idiots could have thought of this," the Warlock told them. He turned back to give the goat its orders.

Stiff-legged and blank of eye, the goat walked into the cavern. They watched it blunder into stalagmites and stumble on until it had reached the entrance to the inner cave... the World-Worm's gullet.

Clubfoot spoke grudgingly, it seemed. "You can wait till morning. Have some dinner."

"No."

Mirandee sat stony-eyed. She did not look up as Orolandes stroked her hair, turned and walked after the goat.

The smell of broiling meat followed him and made it hard to go on. He circled teeth taller than himself. He climbed the soil-gathering potholes in the side of the long, long tail. He walked along the top of the tail with his torch casting yellow light into the gap.

He heard only his own footsteps. The bats... the bats must have been eaten along with Panther. The flickering flame made motion everywhere. How would he know when the roof began to descend?

Far at the back, the tip of a stalagmite tooth showed above a whitish mass that enclosed it.

The last god was no bigger than Panther, made of nearly translucent marble. It sat with its arms and legs wrapped tight around the base of a tooth. Its slanted eyes glowed yellow-white by torchlight. Its face and ears were wolfish, covered with fur. In the triangular shape of its face there was something cat-feminine.

"There's no way to get it loose from

there," he told the magicians. "Your Roze-Katee was a coward, Wayhill. It's got a death-grip on that tooth." And he sat down to eat hot disjointed hare, one-handed, his other arm around a weeping Mirandee. He had been ready to die in there, he had come out alive, and he was famished.

When there was nothing but bones left of the hares, Wayhill said, "It sounds bad."

Orolandes grunted. "We'd have to chop through the tooth at the base, then have a team of men pull out the tooth and statue together. You can't do it. Can we maybe hire some of the Northways? Do they live close enough?"

"No, curse it. Curse the Northways and the Frost Giants and their coward god," said Wayhill, "and my lost vengeance while we're at it. The Frost Giants won't help us use their god, and the Northways wouldn't help us revive it because they're afraid of it."

Clubfoot sat hugging his knees. "I don't believe it. We came all this way, and then... No. There's an answer. We've got food: meat to be called, and snow for water. We'll stay here until we find the answer."

The God of Love and Madness

Fourteen thousand years have garbled all the details.

The last god is remembered as two gods, male and female, Roze become Eros, Katee become Kai and Hecate, their qualities radically changed. Now only children hear of the Warlock's great project. They learn of a foolish frightened hen who ran screaming to tell the world that the world was ending. Some she convinced. In a desperate effort to salvage something, she led them into a cave.

The solution was in the cave. So close.

"We can get close!" A bellowing voice cut deep into the Warlock's dreams.

He rolled over, blinking. He heard rustling and grunts of annoyance around him, and saw Clubfoot looming over him in gray pre-dawn light. Half asleep, he struggled to sit up.

Clubfoot was shivering with excitement. "Wayhill, do you remember that gesture-spell, the variant on the Warlock's Wheel? The one that cancels mana?"

"Remember it? Sure. I designed it. Nearly killed the Warlock with it too. Shall I teach you the gestures?"

The Warlock said, "Wait a minute. I'm still trying to wake up. Clubfoot, have you really got something?"

"Yes! We can't get into the cavern, right? But we can get close! Roze-Katee is just inside the World-Worm's cheek!"

Orolandes woke late, to the smell of roasting rabbit and the pleasant sound of Mirandee's humming. "Eat," she said gaily. "We've got work to do."

"Work? That's good. Yesterday it was all a dead end. Where are the others?"

"Already at work. Today it's different. I had a dream."

"So? Or do you dream the future? You're so much a man's ideal woman, I keep forgetting what else you are."

She kissed him. "Sometimes I dream the future. It's not dependable." Her brow wrinkled. "This one was funny. I guess it means success. I dreamed the sky was falling."

Orolandes laughed. "That sounds scary."

"No, I wasn't frightened at all. And it is what we're after, isn't it?"

"Maybe, but it sounds scary as Hell when you put it like that. What did you feel, watching the sky fall?"

"Nothing."

After breakfast they walked on bare earth, swinging their linked hands. On their left a sloping wall of stone rose out of the earth, higher and higher above them as they walked on. The stone was smooth, worn by the wind, until only a suggestion of scales was left to show that this was the side of the World-Worm's head.

They came to a hole punched in the rock, head-high. Orolandes paused to look, but Mirandee pulled him on.

Clubfoot and the Warlock were waiting as they came up. The magicians had piled rocks as stepping-stones to reach another hole also head-high. Orolandes climbed the pile and looked through.

It was black as a stomach in there. Clubfoot coaxed the end of a branch into flame and handed it up to him. By freight Orolandes saw that he was barely six feet from the marble statue of Roze-Katee.

"How did you break through? We don't have anything for breaking stone."

"We cursed it," said the Warlock. "Wavyhill knows a gesture-spell that cancels the mane in whatever he aims it at. We don't use it much these days. It's wasteful."

Wavyhill spoke from his usual perch on the Warlock's shoulder. "This isn't just rock, after all. It's the flesh of a god, a great brute of a dying god."

Orolandes nodded. "What's the next step? Can you revive Roze-Kattee through that hole?"

"We think so. But the next stage is tricky, and it involves climbing," said the Warlock. "That leaves it up to you and Clubfoot."

Clubfoot nodded, but he didn't look happy.

And Mirandee was frowning. "Why, no. I climb better than you, don't I, Clubfoot?"

"Well, there's more to this than—"

"And I'm as skilled at magic. Unless this is wizardry magic? Just what have you in mind?"

Clubfoot answered in the Guild tongue.

They talked for some time. Whatever they were discussing, it was complicated, judging from Mirandee's frequent questions and the way Clubfoot waved his arms. Orolandes could see that Mirandee didn't like it. He edged closer to those inseparable colleagues, Wavyhill and the Warlock, and asked, "What's going on?"

"Necromancy," said the skull. "Very technical. Can you climb that rock with a pack?"

"Yes. But why is Mirandee—"

"We didn't discuss it with her before. She didn't know what was involved."

"Then—"

"No!" Mirandee snapped. "If it has to be done, I'll do it. Otherwise I wouldn't let you do it either. Orolandes!" She turned her back on Clubfoot, whose face was a study in mixed emotions: sorrow and relief. Mirandee was biting her lower lip.

Orolandes went up alone, barefoot, using as fingerholds and toeholds those crevices and irregularities whose pattern just hinted at serpent-scales worn smooth. There were potholes in the great smooth expanse of the World-Worm's head: real potholes this

time, worn by rain pooling to dissolve rock. Orolandes chopped with the sword point—the blade was uncannily hard—until he had joined adjacent potholes into a knob that would hold the line.

Mirandee toiled up the line. There was nothing Orolandes could do from up here except hurt for her, fear for her. The slope wouldn't kill her if she slipped, but it would remove skin and the flesh beneath, and she might break a leg at the end . . .

But she arrived intact, panting. She said no word to Orolandes. She spilled the pack he had carried up. She selected a chain of tiny silver links and arranged it in a circle. She drew symbols with a piece of red chalk. She looked up.

"Give me your sword," she said.

Orolandes didn't move. "What's it all about?"

"I don't think you want to know."

"Tell me, love."

She sagged. "Necromancy. Magical power derived from death, from murder. We need enough power to awaken a half-dead god. We're going to get it by murdering the World-Worm."

"Oh. More death. Isn't there any other way?"

"I tried to think of one. Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, of course. Of course I believe you."

"Curse it, Orolandes, the World-Worm is dead now. The land has shifted and broken its back in places. It's not even the shape of a snake any more. The wind has worn it away, scales and skin and flesh. If we revived it completely, right now, it would die almost immediately. It's dead, but it doesn't know it yet, and we can take advantage of that. Give me your sword."

He did. "Stand well back," she said, and turned to her work.

The song she sang was unpleasant, grating. Orolandes felt numbness in his toes and fingers and a black depression creeping into his soul. He watched as the dusty stone within the ring of silver turned dusty pink.

Mirandee raised the sword, holding the hilt tightly in both hands. She brought it down hard. Still singing, she pounded on the hilt with a rock until the blade was entirely sheathed.

The mountain shuddered. Orolandes flattened, gripping rock, ready for the next quake. Far back along the mountain chain to the south, he saw motion and churning dust.

The mountain shuddered and spilled Clubfoot's little pile of stones. The Warlock cursed in his mind, but he started chanting immediately. *Let my enemy's heart be mine—* Wavyhill sang the counterpoint next to the Warlock's ear, while Clubfoot worked at moving rocks.

It was hard work, and Clubfoot was in haste. Without the ladder of stones, they could not em their spells into the cavern. Sweat ran down his cheeks and his neck, and he hurled his cloak from him and kept working. Poor Clubfoot, he couldn't even curse. The Warlock sang on and watched the rock pile grow.

High enough. Clubfoot mumbled over a dry branch until it blazed, hurled it through the hole and went up the rocks after it. The Warlock followed more slowly, accepting Clubfoot's assistance. He could feel the power in him now. The World-Worm's life had fled him.

The last god seemed to move in the firelight, but it was illusion. Its marble arms gripped the World-Worm's tooth as tightly as ever.

Wake and see the world . . . They sang the spell he and Clubfoot had sung for Wavyhill, the song for reviving the dead. Wavyhill's voice quavered and shifted. Wavyhill was frightened, and rightly. This could cost him his own not-quite-life. The Warlock could feel the mane leaving him.

In the middle of the chant his voice left him. He managed to finish the phrase, then signalled Clubfoot with a very ancient gesture, a finger across his throat. Clubfoot moved in smoothly. Wavyhill sang on, in an echoless voice that did not pause for breath.

The tree limb had almost burned out. The statue's eyes picked up the firelight like cat's-eye emeralds. The Warlock made his exaggerated passes, and worried. *Let your heart beat, let your blood flow . . . Would a spell worked to revive man revive a god?*

The song ended.

The marble statue did not move. At last Clubfoot sighed and turned from the black opening. He stumbled

ODYSSEY

Novella

down the ladder of stones. The Warlock followed. He was exhausted. The soreness in his throat felt permanent.

"I feel rotten," said Orolandes Shoals of shifting corpses floated past his memory. He sat slumped with his chin on his knees. He could not think of a reason ever to move again. "We killed the World-Worm. How could anything be worth that?"

"It's the spell," Mirandee said. "I feel rotten too. Live with it."

"I'm glad I'm not a magician."

"No, you don't have what it takes."

"What does it take?"

Her black hair was a curtain around her, rendering her anonymous. "It takes another kind of courage. You know what I can do, given the power. Cause solid rock to flow like soft clay in invisible hands. Walk on clouds. Read minds, or take them over, or build illusions more real than reality. Kill with a gesture: one moment a hale and dangerous man, the next a mass of meat already decomposing. I can wake the dead to ask them questions. All those things, and other things I know how to do. They make a hash of what a mundane would call common sense. What scares the wits out of the mundanes is knowing how fragile our reality is. Not many can take that." She shifted a little, but the tent of hair still hid her. "Swordsman, I think we made a mistake, getting so involved with each other."

He nodded. In retrospect it seemed almost ridiculous, how dependent he had been on this woman. "It's no basis for a lifelong love affair, is it? I'm glad you said it first."

When she said nothing, he added, "You read my mind by accident. You must know a spell to break you loose."

"I do."

The sun was warm and bright, and here they sat on the biggest corpse in the world. He had felt so good this morning. Where had it gone?

The witch-woman said, "You're around thirty, aren't you? A child, no more. I'm over seventy. The boy and the old lady, the witch and the swordsman. They don't go," she said sadly.

"You pulled me out of a bad period. I guess you know I'm grateful."

"You're just not in love any more. Nor am I."

"Right."

Mirandee seemed to drift off into a private reverie of her own.

Orolandes was feeling better. The awful death-wish depression was leaving him. It was good to end a love affair this easily, with no hatred, no recriminations, no guilt...

He saw her stiffen.

She stood abruptly. "Let's get down."

"Not so fast," he said as she wound the line round her waist and backed toward the drop. "You're in too much of a hurry. Curse it, slow down, you'll get killed that way!"

Mirandee ignored him. She went down backward, properly, but too dangerously damn fast. "Slow down!" he ordered her.

"No time!"

Huh? Well, it was her neck. He watched her descend.

"I think I've chanted my last spell," the Warlock whispered. His throat felt dry as dust.

"This isn't the end," said Clubfoot. "Only the first attack. We'll talk it over with Mirandee. Figure out what went wrong. Try again."

"Sure."

"I chanted youth spells for you once. I can do it again," said Clubfoot, "once we land the Moon." He paused. "That sounds insane."

"Maybe it is."

They sat slumped against the corpse of the World-Worm. It felt like sandstone now, crumbly soft rock that the winds would wear away. The magicians were exhausted, even Wayvhill, who had not spoken in minutes.

"No maybe about it," Clubfoot said suddenly. "It's crazy. How long have there been men in the world? A couple of thousand years at least, right? Maybe more. Maybe a lot more. But the mana was still rich in the world when some unknown god made men. And they used it."

"Of course they did," said the Warlock. "Why not?"

"The names of the great magicians come down to us. Pitar, Vulcan the Shaper, Hera—Look, what I'm getting at is this. There were a couple of thousand years of mana so rich that none of us, no magician of these last days, has the skill to use it. His spells

would kill him. Do you believe that nobody in those last two thousand years ever tried to land the Moon? Nobody?"

"Why should they?"

"Because it's pretty! And not all those old masters were completely sane, Warlock. And some of the sane ones served mad emperors, like Vulcan served Trillion Mu."

"All right. They tried. Certainly they failed. Maybe they weren't desperate enough."

"Maybe. Another thing. If we don't know what keeps the Moon up, we sure as Fate don't know why. One of the gods put it up, maybe; or many gods; or even a being of unknown power and unknown nature, something that doesn't live on a world at all. If we don't know why the Moon was put there, how can we dare call it down? We don't even dare drain it of mana, because we don't know what ancient spells that might ruin."

"You make sense," the Warlock said with some reluctance. "I've even been wondering if it matters to anyone but us."

"Well, of course it matters..." Clubfoot trailed off.

"Are you sure? Animals die. Classes of animals die. Civilizations die. New things come to take their places. Take Pnssthl. The starstone is gone, but is Pnssthl hurting? It's a thriving village, a trade center. The guard, the one whose grandfather was a magician: he's not hurting. The strong ones adapt, whatever happens."

"I wonder what Mirandee's in such a hurry about? She's coming down awfully fast."

The Warlock didn't hear. He said, "Maybe Pranthier was right. We use Roze-Katiee directly, get what good we can out of the last god. Wayvhill, what do you think?"

"I want to die," said Wayvhill.

"What?"

"It's not worth it. Another ten years of life, another hundred, and so what? People die. Even World-Worms die, and gods, and magicians."

"Wayvhill, what's got into you?"

"Nothing. Nothing's got into me. What could get into a dead man? I don't feel good, I don't feel bad. I guess I like it that way. Turn me off, Warlock. Use the spell we used to break through the World-Worm's

cheek. It won't even hurt."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," Wavyhill said without regret.

Mirandee found them that way, apathetic and dreamy-eyed, when she reached them out of breath and still trying to run. "Where is it?" she demanded.

The Warlock looked up. "What? Oh, the god. It sleeps on."

"Troll dung it does! Can't you feel it?"

"Feel what?"

"Why, it's soaking up all the love and all the madness it can reach! Feeding on it!"

The Warlock stood up fast. Of course, he'd been stupid, they'd all three slipped into sanity without noticing! Sweet reason and solid judgement and philosophical resignation, these were not common among sorcerers. As he scrambled up the piled stones behind Clubfoot, he wondered what had tipped off Mirandee, who was stable and sensible. Then he remembered the Greek swordman.

Clubfoot put his head in the hole. His voice was muffled. "Curse, we forgot to bring a torch! Mirandee, would you—"

The sandstone wall next to them fell outward. A splinter of rock nicked the Warlock's cheek, another struck Wavyhill, tok! Slabs of rock fell and smashed to sand, and behind them the last god stepped forth.

God of love and madness, was it? Roze-Kattee seemed a god of madness alone. It was shaggy with coarse hair, hair that covered its face and chest, barring only the eyes. Its eyes blazed yellow-white, brighter than the daylight. Orolandes had called it small, but it wasn't; it was bigger than the Warlock... and it was growing before their eyes.

Its pointed ears twitched as it looked around at its world. Already its head was above the magicians, and it did not see them. Alien thoughts formed in the Warlock's mind, crushingly powerful.

ALONE? HOW CAN I BE ALONE? I CALL YOU ALL TO ANSWER, YOU WHO RULE THE WORLD...

The last god was male and female both. Its male organs were mounted below and behind the vagina, in such a way that it could probably mate with

itself. And this was embarrassingly clear, because the magicians were now looking up between the tremendous hairy pillars of its legs. It was still growing!

How? Where did it find the power? Roze-Kattee's range must be growing with its size, with its power. The Warlock had never anticipated this; that as the last god, Roze-Kattee was beyond competition. Every madman and every lover must now serve it as a worshipper.

Wavyhill snarled in the Warlock's ear "Get hold of yourselves! Clubfoot, quick, what's your true name? Warlock, wake him up!"

Mirandee and Clubfoot were still gapping. The Warlock shook Clubfoot's shoulder and shouted, "Your true name!"

"Kaharoldil."

Wavyhill sang in the Guild tongue. My name is Kaharoldil, I am your father and mother... The Warlock joined, making Wavyhill's gestures for him. After a moment Clubfoot joined them. It was the old loyalty spell they were using, a spell the Warlock had once rejected as unethical. It decreased the intelligence of its victims. But now he only wondered if it would work.

They had come ill-equipped, and moved too fast. Too much had been forgotten about the gods. Perhaps nobody had ever known enough.

Roze-Kattee was a hairy two-legged mountain now. Its head must be halfway up the World-Worm's head. And still it grew. The Warlock imagined chili sanity engulfing the Frost Giants and their Northway masters, sweeping over the Greek islands, crossing Asian and African mountains; wars ending as weaker armies surrendered to stronger, or as farmers-turned-soldier dropped their spears and returned in haste to harvest their crops; husbands returning to wives, and wives to husbands, for remembered fondness and remembered promises, old habits and the neighbors' approval. Already Roze-Kattee had changed the world.

Orolandes lay on his back on the crumbly rock, looking up at the sky.

He had tried a drug once. Something an American was carrying. The red man had burned leaves in a fire, and Orolandes and some of his troop had

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ODYSSEY

Novella

sniffed the smoke. He had felt like this, then. Abstracted. Able to view himself, his friends, his environs, from a godlike distance and with godlike clarity.

It had not seemed worthwhile to follow Mirandee down the mountain. Whatever she and the others were planning, it could hardly be worthy of his attention.

Even the guilt was gone. That was nice.

There was a muffled booming somewhere far away. He ignored it.

Then a section of rock the size of a parade ground, not far from where he was lying, settled and heaved and dropped away. Thunder sounded below him.

The corpse of the World-Worm was decomposing.

Orolandes moved by reflex. He swept gear into his pack (leaving gear on the battlefield could get you killed next time), donned the pack and went backward down the rope. He tried to keep his weight on the rock, not on the line. The knob of rock could crumble. His life was at stake, and Orolandes truly did not have the gift for abstraction.

I CALL YOU TO ANSWER, YOU WHO RULE THE WORLD.

Orolandes stiffened. Those were not his thoughts. He looked around.

He was then halfway down the slope, several hundred feet up. He saw a beast-thing with glowing yellow eyes, eyes level with his own. The great eyes locked with his, considered him, then turned away.

Orolandes continued to descend.

Certainly it would have been easy to let go. His muscles ached from the strain of climbing... but the hurt didn't seem to matter either. It was easier to follow his training.

I am Keharoldi, your teacher and your wet-nurse and your ancestors' ghosts. I tell you things for your own good. Wavyhill and Mirandee and Clubfoot sang, and the Warlock's fingers made patterns in the air.

Roze-Kattee heard.

The tall ears twitched, the head swiveled, the blazing yellow eyes found them clustered on the ground. Roze-Kattee dropped to knees and hands, the better to observe them.

Wavyhill said, "Ah, never mind."

Right. What did it matter? Clubfoot had stopped singing too. Roze-Kattee covered the sky, its yellow eyes were twin suns. The Warlock sat down, infinitely weary, and leaned back against crumbling rock to watch the last god grow.

A thought formed, and tickled. Roze-Kattee was amused.

YOU WOULD USE A LOVE-SPELL ON ME?

Why, yes, a loyalty spell was a form of love spell. They'd been silly.

SILLY AND PRESUMPTUOUS. BUT YOU HAVE WAKED ME FROM MY DEATH SLEEP. HOW MAY I REWARD YOU?

The Warlock thought about it. Truly, he didn't know. What must be would be.

YOU WISHED TO BRING DOWN THE MOON? AGAIN the thought tickled. PERHAPS I WILL.

"Wait," said Clubfoot, but he did not go on.

Now the Warlock imagined a fat sphere, blue and bluish-brown and clothed white. He sensed a watery film of life covering that sphere... and he sensed how thin it was. Remove the life from the world, and what would have changed?

This resignation, this fatalism, this dispassionate overview of reality went far beyond mere sanity, thought the Warlock. Roze-Kattee had practiced his power long before men ever put names to it. Now he imagined a smaller sphere, its rough surface the color of Wavyhill's skull. It cruised past the larger sphere in a curved path. Now it stopped moving, then began to drift toward the larger sphere. Now the spheres bumped, and deformed, and merged in fire. A sticky cloud of flame began to cool and condense.

IS THIS WHAT YOU WANTED?

"No," Mirandee whispered.

"No!" Wavyhill shouted. "No, you maniac! We didn't know!"

BUT IT IS WHAT I WANT. I CAN LIVE THROUGH THE TIME OF FIRE. I NEED THE... STATE OF THINGS THAT LETS GODS LIVE, THAT WARPS DEAD REALITY TO LIVING REALITY. WITH THE DEAD MOON'S AID I WILL PEOPLE THE CHANGED EARTH. WITH MY CHILDREN. BECAUSE YOU HAVE SERVED ME, I WILL CREATE EACH OF YOU OVER AGAIN

The last god had grown so huge that Orolandes couldn't even find it at first. He stepped back from the rope and looked around him. There were the magicians, a good distance away, doing nothing obvious about the menace. There, what he'd taken for a mountain became a pillar of coarse pale hair... leading up into a hairy torso... Orolandes froze, trying to understand.

Then pictures invaded his mind and sent him reeling dizzily against the rock wall.

Nobody had ever told him that the world was round. After the daydream-pictures stopped flitting through his mind, he remembered that. He remembered that everyone was about to die. But the pictures he had understood so well, grew muddled now, and faded.

Never mind. What to do next? Orolandes thought of fleeing; but he wasn't frightened.

HOW CAN I STOP THE MOON IN ITS COURSE? YOU WHO WORK IN A LAND THAT IS ALMOST DEAD, YOU MUST HAVE CONSIDERED THIS. The question came with crushing urgency, and Orolandes thought frantically. How would a Greek soldier go about stopping the Moon? Then his head cleared...

Well. The last god was proving very dangerous. Perhaps it would be best to kill the thing. Orolandes thought. The magicians seemed in no position to do so, and killing wasn't really their field.

He pulled the silver chain from the back pack. He found the red chalk too, looked at it... but he had paid no attention to Mirandee's symbols. Nor to the arm-waving. Best stick with the chain and the sword.

And still he wasn't frightened. It was strange to be thinking this way, as if Orolandes had no more importance than any other man or woman. He had lost even love of self. This was no drug dream. It was like battlefield exhaustion, when he had fought and killed and run and fought until even his wounds no longer hurt and dying meant nothing but a chance to lie down. Thence he had known that terrible death of self. He had not stopped fighting then.

YES. GOOD. I CAN DO THAT, he thought; and he imagined himself stretching into the sky, growing very

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thin and very tall.

But it was Roze-Kattee that stood upright and reached skyward. Roze-Kattee's furry legs grew narrow, and the knees went up and up; but Roze-Kattee's torso receded much faster, up through a cloud layer and onward.

There was no way to reach a vital spot now. Well . . . Orolandes marched toward the last god's foot.

There was now something spidery about Roze-Kattee. The eyes were tiny dots of light, stars faint by daylight and right overhead. The fingers of both hands were now thin as spiderweb strands: a web enclosing a pale crescent moon. The feet had spread and flattened as it under enormous pressure, and Orolandes had no trouble stepping up onto the foot itself, though it must be several acres in area.

He jogged toward the slender ankle. His skin felt puffy. He guessed that the sensation came from Roze-Kattee, and ignored it. He never guessed its origin: most of Roze-Kattee was in vacuum.

The last god's ankle was like an ancient redwood, slender only in proportion. Orolandes looped the silver chain and held it against the pale skin. He thrust through the loop. The blade grated against bone. He withdrew the blade, moved the loop and thrust again. The point scraped bone, found a joint and sank to the hilt.

He grasped the hilt on both hands and worked the blade back and forth. Roze-Kattee was slow to respond. Without impatience Orolandes withdrew the blade and stabbed again.

HURT! Orolandes yelled and grabbed his ankle. It felt like a snake had struck him. No wound . . . but he would not be unwounded long, because Roze-Kattee's spidery hands were descending in slow motion.

Something else had changed. Suddenly it mattered very much whether Orolandes the Greek survived. Orolandes ran limping across the last god's foot, swearing through clenched teeth.

The Warlock said, "What?" exactly as if someone had spoken. He shook his head. Now what had startled him? And how had he hurt his foot? He bent to look, but the scream stopped him. Mirande's scream. "Orolandes!"

It was a puzzling sight. Roze-Kattee was spread across the view like a

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ODYSSEY

Novella

stick-figure defacing a landscape painting. It sloped as if to be a bootlace. And Mirandee was running toward the left foot, toward where a flea seemed to be scuttling toward a mound of dirt...

Then it jumped into perspective, and the Warlock saw Orolandes running for a gap in the World-Worm's cheek. He snapped, "Wavyhill!"

"Here. I'd say the last god is completely out of control."

"Worse than that. He had us until he was distracted."

"Suggestions?"

"Kill it," said the Warlock.

Wavyhill didn't like the taste of that. He said, "How?"

"That mana-destroying spell of yours. I don't know anything else that would work."

Now the swordsman was somewhere inside the World-Worm's mouth. Roze-Kattee reached with spidery fingers into a hole a much sner Roze-Kattee had broken in the sandstone cheek.

Clubfoot was on the ground, his arms over his face, his body clenched like a fist.

"I hate it," said Wavyhill. "All our work, lost. All that power, lost. Why not use Mirandee's vampire spell?"

"Could she hold that much power? It would fry her. Could you? Could I? Poor Clubfoot's already had more than he can take."

"That's the world's last large source of mana, and you talk of burning it out to save a swordsman?"

"To save the world," the Warlock said gently.

"Even Roze-Kattee can't bring down the Moon by pushing on it!"

Pain stabbed at the Warlock's hand. Roze-Kattee howled in their brains... and was suddenly quiet. It turned to look at them, to study them.

Wavyhill was shouting, "But what about us?" when the blazing yellow eyes found him. "Never mind," he said. "I think I see."

Those eyes: they could make you not care; they could make you lose interest. They guaranteed a dispassionate overview and a selfless judgement. That gift of dispassion was Roze-Kattee's power over madness.

Its power over love was its option to withhold the gift. Lovers would be grateful. Whole tribes would show their

gratitude, or die for lack of children.

The last god was the god that had made the fewest mistakes. Its last mistake was the gift it gave to Wavyhill the necromancer.

The Warlock said, "I don't care if it can bring down the Moon or not. It's got to die. The world belongs to us, or to that. Never both."

"I said I understand," said Wavyhill. He began to sing.

The cavern was black. Orolandes stayed on his hands and knees. Stalagmites he could feel his way around, but a drooping stalactite would take his head off. His foot hurt like fury. He turned left, toward the cavern's main entrance.

Marble pillars tipped with claws blasted their way through the wall and began feeling their way around, knocking World-Worm teeth in all directions.

Now there was light. Orolandes waited.

The hand paused as if bewildered.

Orolandes sprang. He slashed at a knuckle, howled, set himself and slashed again. He ducked under the wounded finger and slashed at another. Nobody who loved Orolandes would have recognized him now, with saliva dripping from his jaws and his face contorted in murder-lust.

The hand reacted at last. It spasmed. Then it cupped and swept through the cavern gathering spires of rock. It gathered Orolandes. He stabbed again, into a joint. Then closing fingers squeezed the breath from him. His eyes blurred...

He was lying in a jumble of broken spores when Mirandee came, picking her way delicately through fallen rock. Her face was above him when he opened his eyes. Her fingers were on his throat, taking his pulse.

"It's all over," she said.

Orolandes sighed. "I've been thinking of giving up magic." What should have been a joke only made her nod soberly. In daylight spilling through the smashed cavern wall, her hair glowed white. On her shadow-darkened face Orolandes' caress found roughness and wrinkles.

The daylight was dwindling when they left the cavern. Orolandes walked with a list; he suspected broken ribs. He saw no trace of Roze-Kattee. It was possible to imagine that the mountain

range to the south had the shape of a serpent, or that the earthquake-shattered cavern had some of the symmetry of a snake's mouth. But really, the landscape was quite ordinary. Where the magicians had made their last stand, he found the red man curled up and apparently asleep beside what seemed a human skeleton with two skulls.

Mirandee stooped, with difficulty. She was an old woman, and her knees hurt. She put a hand on Clubfoot's shoulder and said, "Kaharoidi, speak to me."

"I couldn't handle it," Clubfoot said without moving.

"You can't go mad. Roze-Kattee saw to that. Come on, sit up. We need you. We're both hurt."

"Roze-Kattee?"

"Dead and gone."

"Good." Clubfoot rolled over and opened his eyes. He touched the two skulls next to him, almost caressingly.

"Nice, wasn't it?" he said, perhaps to the skulls. "Knowing how to grant wishes instead of working for them. Must have been bad when the gods were alive, though. They might grant your wish, they might grant your enemy's, but for damn sure they'd grant their own. A god's wishes wouldn't have anything to do with what human beings wanted. Even worship was a form of extortion, and the gods knew it, and they played jokes when they could. If they hadn't needed us..." Clubfoot looked up at last.

"Mirandee, love, we should have remembered. Everyone else remembers what the gods were like. Whimsical. Willful. They wiped out humanity at least once, and made him over again. These last thousand years were a golden age. We got our wishes granted, but not often, and not too far granted, and it took some skill to do it."

"It's over," Mirandee said.

Clubfoot nodded. "You rest. Both of you. I'll go call up some dinner. Here, Orolandes—" Clubfoot managed to carry most of Orolandes' weight while the swordsman went through the difficult process of sitting down.

He stared when Orolandes held out his sword. "What's this?"

"You may not be able to call anything. No magic."

Clubfoot nodded. He took the sword. ★

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"To pyramid this investment into retirement in less than ten years seems like magic, but in my opinion any man in good health who has the same ambition and drive that motivated me, could achieve such a goal. Let me give you a little history.

"I finished high school at the age of 18 and got a job as a shipping clerk. My next job was butchering at a plant that processed boneless beef. Couldn't see much future there. Next, I got a job as a Greyhound Bus Driver. The money was good. The work was pleasant, but I couldn't see it as leading to retirement. Finally I took the plunge and went into business for myself.

"I managed to raise enough money with my savings to invest in a combination motel, restaurant, grocery, and service station. It didn't take long to get my eyes opened. In order to keep that business going my wife and I worked from dawn to dusk, 20 hours a day, seven days a week. Putting in all those hours didn't match my idea of independence and it gave me no time for my favorite sport—golf! Finally we both agreed that I should look for something else.

"I found it. Not right away. I investigated a lot of businesses offered as franchises. I felt that I wanted the guidance of an experienced company—wanted to have the benefit of the plans that had brought success to others, plus the benefit of running my own business under an established name that had national recognition.

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"So, I started. I took the wonderful training furnished by the company. When I was ready I followed the simple plan outlined in the training. During the first period I did all the service work myself. By doing it myself, I could make much more per hour than I had ever made on a salary. Later, I would hire men, train them, pay them well, and still make an hourly profit on their time that made my idea of retirement possible—I had joined the country club and now I could play golf whenever I wished.

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